**City of Vancouver Police Community Advisory Committee**

**Meeting 1 – March 27, 2024**

Bridgeview Resource Center

**Facilitator –** Christine Moses, PhD, EnviroIssues

**Presenters**

* William Cooley, City of Vancouver
* Assistant Chief Erica Nilsen, Vancouver Police Department
* Corporal Robert Block, Vancouver Police Department
* VPD Sergeant Spencer Harris, Vancouver Police Department
* VPD Officer Nicole Vigil, Vancouver Police Department

**PCAC Members**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **X** | **Martha Baumgarten** | **X** | **Jean-Pierre “JP” Parent** |
|  | **Paul Burgess** | **X** | **Cindy Reed** |
| **X** | **Gabriela Ewing** | **X** | **Dominick Rose** |
| **X** | **Mark Frazier** |  | **Kia Simeon** |
| **X** | **Lester Griffin** |  | **Destiny Trevino** |
| **X** | **Josie Hyde** | **X** | **Mayor Anne McEnerny-Ogle** |
| **X** | **James “Jim” Kirkendall** | **X** | **Councilor Sarah Fox** |
| **X** | **Sidney Morgan** |  | **Councilor Erik Paulsen** |

**Big questions to keep in mind for each meeting**

* What outcomes and impacts are most important to the community?
* How can the City report on these outcomes in ways that build accountability and trust?
* How can the City address gaps in staffing, facilities and technology to ensure that Vancouver is a safer place for all community members?
* How can the City of Vancouver ensure that police services are resourced to meet the needs of our growing community?

**Agenda**

**Introductions & Pair Activity (William & Christine)**

Committee members paired off to discuss the following questions:

Prompt 1: During our first meeting, what, if anything, surprised you?

Prompt 2: What is a topic that you are looking forward to talking about during future committee meetings?

**Community Needs and Expectations (William & Christine)**

William discussed the Blockwise – Q4 Executive Summary Report

* This is a citywide survey that is distributed through digital media, phone/text, etc.
* It asks people what their feedback is regarding their sense of safety in Vancouver and what their top 3 concerns are. The top concerns are:
	+ Theft, burglary and break-ins
	+ Homelessness
	+ Streets and traffic
* City has access to the demographic data for the respondents (over 550 respondents) and can share that with committee upon request.
* Questions by committee
	+ Martha: How many people are approached to respond to this?
		- William: Not exactly sure, but in the thousands based on the mediums that we use for outreach.
	+ Martha: When it comes to top concerns by area, how are the districts defined?
		- William: Referred to Slide 20 of the presentation slide deck, which provides a district map, along with population per district.
		- Nilsen: There are 4 districts.3
			* District 1: West of Grand
			* District 2: West of Andresen
			* District 3: West of I-205
			* District 4: East of I-205
	+ Martha: Re: Methodology – there's an ability to benchmark. Are we going to talk about that?
		- William and Jaycee to follow up with information after the meeting.
	+ Sarah: What were the questions that the back of the handout is referring to?
		- Jaycee Elliott (City of Vancouver): They are composite scores based on question themes. The City can provide the broader set of questions, which can also be benchmarked against other cities.
		- William: Some questions/comments include:
			* Do you feel safe in your neighborhood?
			* I feel that the police will treat me fairly when I interact with them.
			* I feel that the police will treat me with respect when I interact with them.
	+ Sidney: Is the data disaggregated by race?
		- Sidney mentioned that there should be more ways that the City is attempting to reach people beyond social media/digital media channels. As someone who is heavily engaged locally, she was concerned that she hadn’t heard of the survey before. She also didn’t know what district she lived in, and felt that other people didn’t know theirs either.
		- William: The City recognizes that there have been limitations in outreach strategies to the population the survey reaches and that this is something that they could work on in future surveys.
		- Gabriela noted that she had come across the survey.

Discussion on how we define and measure safety (What public safety needs are most important to committee members and the community)

Prompt 1: What does a safe community look like and feel like?

* Gabriela: Safe communities have less shootings, break-ins and car thefts. She explained that there were gunshots near the park by her residence recently. She expected first responders to respond quickly, but it took 20 minutes. There should also be less houselessness (by providing more housing opportunities).
* JP: There should be a focus on mitigating the risk factors to address why crimes occur in the first place. Once police are responding to a crime, it already feels too late. He felt that people steal or break-in for two reasons: either from extreme desperation or from a perceived lack of consequences. He had break-ins at his business in Portland and the police wouldn’t respond, which he felt spoke to a broken justice system. There needs to be consequences for actions people take.
* Martha: If a neighborhood is tidy and clean, it feels safer. The more that a neighborhood is unkempt (e.g. graffiti), it gives the impression to people looking for opportunities to create a problem that they can do that.
	+ Lester: He agreed that tidiness makes it feel like people are watching, which can curb problem behavior. He also explained that a street may not look safe to some people, but other people can walk down the same street and feel safe because they may feel more familiar with what’s happening around them.
* Lester: Safety is respect for oneself and for others. When you have that respect, you care about how people look at you and respect other people and their property in return.
* Gabriela: The Parks and Recreation Department feels like part of the safety system. She works with people on Fourth Plain. Families mention that people find syringes in the parks, which makes them feel unsafe to let their kids play there. The families have also mentioned that they don’t feel safe walking down the street due to people sleeping on the ground, people being intoxicated, etc.
	+ Mark: The community has to be involved to step in and help that address local issues (like helping clean up the park if there are syringes in it). Public safety can’t do it all. It’s also good to have strong relationships with your neighbors who can act as eyes on the street in their neighborhoods. A community that sees stuff that needs to be fixed, should step up to support.
* **General Takeaways**
	+ Streets are safer when there is less crime and houselessness, when neighborhoods and parks are well maintained, and when people have respect for themselves and others. Streets are also safer when the upstream factors that lead to criminal activity are addressed while also ensuring that accountability is had when crimes are perpetrated.

Prompt 2: When it comes to public safety, how should we measure success?

* Dominick (in the chat): “78.4% of residents stated they were very or fairly willing to contact the PD if they were a victim of a crime or were worried about something.” Increasing this metric seems like one way to increase public safety success and VPD’s overall outreach efforts.

Prompt 3: What should all community members expect of Vancouver’s police services?

* [Skipped this question due to time constraints. The committee will revisit this question in future meetings.]

**[Content Warning – Discussions of violence, deaths, and substance abuse below]**

**Continue Conversation about Staffing (Assistant Chief Nilsen & VPD Staff)**

AC Nilsen revisited key data from Meeting #1, where she provided additional context and answered committee member questions that were submitted after Meeting #1. - Begins on Slide 11.

* Half of current officers have less than 5 years on the force. The VPD is constantly hiring. It takes over a year of training and education before officers are able to respond to 911 calls.

Nilsen provided recent local examples of critical/intensive calls that the VPD has responded to.

* [Slide 12] In the mall brandishing case, the suspect was pointing a firearm at other people in the mall. It took one hour for VPD to respond – with 17 officers responding in total. It took over 5 labor hours to conclude the call. Had there been a shooting, it would have taken even more time and resources.
* [Slide 13] It took over 28 of labor hours to conclude the call for the highwire crime spree case. Took 8 hours between initial dispatch to jail booking. Took 14 police units for 8 hours to deal with one person for one call.
* Jim: Can the Portland Police Bureau (PPB) or the Multnomah County Sherriff’s Office (MCSO) support?
	+ Erica Nilsen: Washington State law currently prohibits law enforcement outside of the state of Washington from crossing state lines with their firearms. VPD can cross to Portland to support, but not the other way around.
	+ City Manager Eric Holmes: If that law changed, would that make a material difference?
		- Nilsen: She feels that way. Neither City has enough officers, but southwest Washington doesn’t have a Tier 1 back up team since PPB and MCSO can't support. We could reinstate intercity police agreements if the law were to change.

Officers from VPDs Traffic, Crime Reduction, and Neighborhood Police Officer Units held brief presentations and answered Committee questions.

**Traffic Unit (Corporal Block)** – spoke on street and traffic safety [Slide 15]

* Block has been with the Traffic Unit (TU) for 6 years, with the VPD for 8 years. The TU consists of 1 sergeant and 6 officers. 10-12 years ago, the TU had 16 traffic cars, including motorcycles.
* Block gave a presentation on traffic collisions, injuries, and fatalities in 2023 and 2024.
* In all there were 27 crashes in 2023 that required collision investigation as far as a complete reconstruction which can take up to 1.5 months to do. There were 10 fatal collisions: 4 involved pedestrians. 5 included drugs/alcohol. Seventeen other critical accidents with no fatalities but serious injuries occurred
	+ In 2024, there have been 4 fatalities so far and could be up to 16-20 by the end of the year.
* 2024 – 50 DUI arrests since Jan. 1. There were 445 DUI arrests in 2023.
* Regular crashes. Had 2,511 collision reports in the City. 150+ involved pedestrians and 69 involved bicyclists. So far this year, they’re at 700 crash reports so on track to do worse than last year.
	+ Sarah: The City is undergoing several street redesign projects. She hopes those redesigned streets will help reduce the number of collisions.
		- Block: He’s hoping that reducing lanes will help. During rush hour, traffic is bad. Something he has noticed is that most of the accidents that include pedestrians and bicyclists happen because they’re being in the road where they shouldn’t be. Four fatalities they’ve had this year are pedestrians and they were all running across the road where they shouldn’t be wearing dark clothes.
		- William: Transportation planners have three approaches to addressing pedestrian/bicycle fatalities: Engineering, education, and enforcement.
	+ William: What does proactive policing look like in the TU?
		- Block: TU helps patrol with fender bender crashes and goes out and make traffic stops, where they arrest for DUIs. The more drunk/impaired people off the road, the safer it is for everybody.
	+ Gabriela: Is there a list of streets where most of the accidents happen?
		- William shared the [City of Vancouver Collision Dashboard](https://city-of-vancouver-wa-geo-hub-cityofvancouver.hub.arcgis.com/apps/9d0363af1b7a418b9395373c97bcd9c4).
	+ Eric: Earlier this week, the governor signed a new law to allow more traffic cameras. Would that be helpful?
		- Block: He would love to see more cameras. Right now, the TU relies on C-TRAN. Their new Vine stops have cameras at bus stops. If VPD had those at intersections, it could help track down vehicles that do hit and runs.
	+ Ericc: Would cameras help with enforcement?
		- Block: He gave an example from another town where there was a large sign in a school zone that stated that there was a traffic camera. He noticed that traffic stayed under 20mph, which isn’t the case in Vancouver. He also noted that, because they’re automated, even VPD officers can get citations if they’re speeding or running lights.
		- Nilsen: Portland has red light cameras as well as speeding cameras and they’re very effective. It made a huge difference on the number of accidents as well as speeding.
* Currently, the TU has a temporary sergeant because VPD doesn’t have the funds to staff a full time sergeant. Under the last chief, there was a 2020 plan that determined what staffing should look like. Based on that plan, there should be 3-4 additional officers than what they have now. The VPD does not currently have any motorcycle police and are lacking enforcement opportunities because so much of their time is spent investigating collisions.
* There are 2 routes in the TU.
	+ Drug Recognition Expert (DRE) officers who have been through field sobriety certification. Officers can also get the Advanced Roadside Impaired Driving Enforcement (ARIDE) certification. ARIDE-certified officers can conduct additional field sobriety testing. This certification allows officers to be expert witnesses in courts, but to get to that level, have to send them out of state. The last group of VPD officers went to Arizona for the course, which took 6 weeks of total classroom time along with field time to certify.
	+ Officers can also specialize in field investigation and collisions. Block took a class that was a month long. He has 792 hours of collision investigation classes he’s been through so far.

**Crime Reduction Unit (CRU) (Sergeant Harris)** – spoke on challenges investigating crime and their approach to proactive policing

* Harris has worked for VPD over 20 years.
* The CRU focuses on violent crime reduction (taking guns and drugs off the streets).
* In 2023, Harris was in charge of the Neighborhood Response Team (NRT). There used to be 2 units with 4 detectives and 1 supervisor per unit. There is now only 1 supervisor and 6 detectives. CRU is citywide. During COVID there was a huge spike in shootings. Portland responded to 1,500 reported shootings. Vancouver had 100s of shootings of well (10-15% compared to Portland). Suspects will live in Vancouver and cross the river to commit crimes.
* There is a NIBIN system where they take ammo casings which can be linked with specific guns. They can use analytical data to be able to bring together suspects/groups/gangs. This requires collaboration with PPB, MCSO, Clark County Sherriff’s Office, and Gresham Police Department.
* Last year, NRT moved to the CRU. There were 275 arrests and 113 firearms along with some explosives that were taken off the streets.
* An issue the CRU has is that they go after, arrest, and book fugitives, but then they make bail and then they keep committing violent acts. It’s a cycle.
* Another big issue the CRU is navigating is the introduction of Fentanyl in the community. It’s completely changed the drug trafficking world. There are now more overdoses, deaths, and gun shootings related to the drug trade.
* With Assistant Chief Nilsen on the force, the CRU conducts more stolen vehicle operations in collaboration with PPB.
* The CRU holds a lot of community presentations with the Evergreen School District and with nonprofit groups because there’s been a spike in youth violence, gun violence, car thefts, etc.
* Last year, CRU worked with VHA housing. There was a big issue around large call response related to gun and drug trafficking. The CRU work with management of the VHA housing and have been able to make many arrests. It is no longer a hot spot from a data standpoint. More officers will make it possible to continue doing that.
	+ Lester: So you used to have double the staff? Was it a gang taskforce?
		- Harris: The VPD lost 50% of workforce that would address these concerns (the NRTs). If you have drug complaints, those won’t be addressed because they’re responding to gun violence.
		- There used to be a gang taskforce in conjunction with the FBI, but the VPD doesn’t have that anymore.
	+ Martha: What was the catalyst for the restructuring?
		- Harris: Lack of available staff.
	+ Martha: Is it a reasonable expectation that if staffing increased, they would join the CRU?
		- Harris: Yes.
		- Eric: The demand for calls for service has outstripped VPD capacity. There haven’t been layoffs.
		- Nilsen: CRU officers don’t respond to 911 calls. As calls went up, VPD couldn’t afford officers to work on specific crimes, they had to have people start patrolling that used to not take calls.
		- Harris: Call volumes have skyrocketed.
		- Jaycee: The amount of time police have in a day to be call-responsive has reduced as they are participating in more training, which is important, but it creates a squeeze.
		- Nilsen: Report writing takes a lot longer than it used to in the past due to requirements and also the advent of using technologies like body cams, which she supports.
	+ Lester: Do you calculate numbers of police brutality compared to when you had more?
		- Nilsen: Use of force reporting has changed over the years. Things that we may not have reported before, we report now so the numbers may look higher now. If you look at the national definition, it’s different than the Washington state use of force definition, which is different from VPD’s definition. Since the definition has changed, it’s hard to say accurately how much it’s gone up.
		- Jaycee: The state is creating a dashboard to track use of force reports and should be online sometime next year.

**Neighborhood Police Officers (NPOs) (Officer Vigil)** - spoke on engagement and community-oriented policing. [Slide 18]

* Vigil has been with VPD since 2017. Prior to that, she worked worked with youth who were self-identified gang members in Clark County.
* There are 4 NPOs (1 per district). They go to a lot of NA meetings and community engagement events. There are 71 NAs in Vancouver. Vigil suggested committee members attend NA meetings if they want to provide additional input. The NPOs want to be present and a human in a uniform.
* NPOs also deal with livability issues. They work with business owners who are impacted by houselessness issues.
* They work with neighbor problems but are not always call responsive. Sometimes patrol officers don’t have the ability/time to dig deeper into neighbor problems.
	+ Vigil shared a story about a woman that had been repeatedly calling the police to complain about a neighbor that was blowing leaves into her driveway. Vigil chose to connect with the caller who pointed them to their next door neighbor. When Vigil connected with the neighbor, she found out that the neighbor was from Ukraine and had Ring camera footage that showed that the initial caller was harassing her. She had never called police and was grateful to Vigil for connecting with her.
* Nilsen: What does a safe community look like to you? It’s NPOs. The perfect VPD is community policing. We use it as a buzzword and no one knows what it means. It means an officer that’s dedicated to your neighborhood that you know and who knows you and the community feels comfortable because they know the officer knows the neighborhood. The only way to do that is to have enough officers that know their communities.
	+ Martha: How many NPOs should there be?
		- Nilsen: A lot more. Chief Mori wants to have that conversation next time.
			* Eric: We have a resident population of 200k along with about 70k businesses. That’s 50,000 people and 15k businesses per NPO. When you start to think about those ratios, it’s impossible for stories like Vigil’s to scale at this point.
		- Lester: Are NPOs a new thing?
			* Vigil: No, it’s been around for 15 years. New roles though. Part of the HART team.
			* Lester: He was pulled over by an NPO due to a similar car description. Officer believed him and let him leave. He felt that it would have been a different experience 20 years ago. He likes the idea of NPOs.
	+ Anne: NPOs are also responsible for NOW volunteers.
* **General Takeaways**
	+ Each unit detailed their role and how investment into staff and technological resources could improve their ability to serve communities.
		- The Traffic Unit would like to increase its number of staff so they can more proactively police instead of using their existing resources on investigating traffic collisions. They would also welcome the use of more speed and redlight cameras.
		- The Crime Reduction Unity would like to increase its number of staff so that there are two Neighborhood Response Teams (to reflect its prior numbers). This would help free up officer time so they could respond to more drug-related crimes since most of their time is spent on violent/gun crimes.
		- The Neighborhood Police Officer unit would like to increase its staffing to build relationships with community members to more effectively and positively engage in community policing.

**Closing Activity/Preview of Meeting #3 (William & Christine)**

[The closing activity was skipped due to time constraints]

* Christine encouraged committee members to review the meeting notes to ensure that their questions and comments are reflected accurately.
* William offered to gather additional questions if people have them after the meeting. He also offered to have people leave their notes.
* On April 18, the meeting will not be held at the Bridgeview Resource Center (location is TBD).

**Action Items**

* The City to provide more detailed survey questions, disaggregated findings from the Blockwise – Q4 Executive Summary Report based on race, as well as some benchmarking data.
* The City to provide additional information regarding the outreach methods for the Blockwise survey along with how the City is expanding its efforts to reach more people who aren’t active on social media or as plugged in to City happenings.
* The City to provide the VPD district maps, showing streets and neighborhoods in each district
* VPD to discuss benchmarking with other cities at the April 18 meeting.
	+ VPD to discuss staffing needs at the next meeting when Chief Mori is present.