**City of Vancouver Police Community Advisory Committee**

**Meeting 4 – May 9, 2024**

Aspen Room | Vancouver City Hall

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

**Presenters**

* William Cooley, City of Vancouver
* Eric Holmes, City Manager
* Assistant Chief Erica Nilsen, Vancouver Police Department

**PCAC Members**

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| **X** | **Martha Baumgarten** |  | **Jean-Pierre “JP” Parent** |
| **X** | **Paul Burgess** |  | **Cindy Reed** |
|  | **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 & Centering Exercise (William & Christine)**

Committee members were asked if anyone wanted to make changes to the Meeting #3 summary.

* No committee members provided suggested edits to the summary.

**Activity Introduction (Christine)**

Christine introduced the evening’s, which begins with an individual reflection, followed by two small group discussions, and finishing with a committee-wide share out of what was discussed in each group.

**Individual Reflection (Christine)**

Committee members were asked to reflect on the following:

* What are Vancouver’s greatest needs when it comes to public safety?
* What issues are the most important for VPD to address?
* Based on our conversations so far, what type of investments would you want to see in VPD or the broader public safety ecosystem?

**Small Group Conversation #1 (William)**

Committee members were asked to discuss their individual reflections in small groups.

* What are Vancouver’s greatest needs when it comes to public safety?
* What issues are the most important for VPD to address?
* Based on our conversations so far, what type of investments would you want to see in VPD or the broader public safety ecosystem?

**Small Group Conversation #2 (William)**

Committee members were asked to identify their top 5 priorities for VPD in their small groups.

* What are the five most important priorities that your group would like to see VPD address? Why are these priorities important to you?

**Groups share their priorities and reflections (Committee & Christine)**

Committee members were asked to share their small group reflections with the rest of the committee. Common themes were noted.

*What are the five most important priorities that your group would like to see VPD address? Why are these priorities important to you?*

Group 1

1. **More officers and staff.**
   * 1. Recruitment.
        1. Support from the City and community could help increase interest in recruitment.
     2. Training.
        1. Using volunteers (e.g. NOW) can help offset the number of sworn officers needed.
2. **Increase officer visibility.**
3. Officer visibility in public can increase feelings of safety.
4. More positive and reciprocal interactions between the community and police would help build community understanding of what the officers are going through, what their jobs are, etc. and in turn build support.
5. Close the gap between law enforcement and the community.
6. **Assign districts.**
7. Discourage officers from switching districts to help retain community knowledge at the neighborhood level.
8. **More NPOs that work with a team of staff.**
9. Get more NPOs that aren’t about enforcement but more about building a sense of community care.
10. Doesn’t have to be uniformed officers.

Group 2

* Community-based law enforcement, which emphasizes doing more proactive work instead of reactive work.

1. **Increase the number of NPOs.**
2. The use of NPOs provides more opportunity for the VPD to build relationships with the community.
3. Increase positive officer-initiated interactions.
4. **Build more community-based organizational relationships.**
5. Create a coalition.
6. What would it mean for us to have coalitions in communities to support officers in their districts? While this is ideal, this comes with challenges when resources are scarce for nonprofits.
7. Access services CBOs are already offering.
8. Example: Columbia River Mental Health (CRMH) Response Team on 4th Plain Boulevard.
9. Have social workers on staff as frontline access to respond to mental health needs and family crises.
10. **Neighborhood conflict resolution hub.**
11. E.g. Community hubs in Oakland. Community members that have credibility within communities helps effectively decrease violence as crises arise.
12. Find opportunities to have trained residents in conflict resolution.
13. **Increased staffing overall (not necessarily officers).**
14. Emphasis on support staff for officers.
15. **Employee retention strategies.**
16. A lot of this is based on culture. How do we figure out what, within the culture of the VPD, could help improve employee retention strategies.

Group 3

1. **Right size the ratio of officers to the size of the population.**
2. Work on building a retention strategy.
3. Focus on recruitment, especially of NPOs.
4. **Work on building more work life balance for officers and staff to improve mental health of the staff.**
5. Find ways to reduce officer overtime.
6. **Focus on addressing the investigation backlog of 3,100 cases.**
7. **Build or improve partnerships in the community to reduce the burden on VPD to make the community feel safer.**
8. These partnerships should center addressing drug/addiction issues in our city.
9. **Utilize technology to address things like traffic citations.**
10. E.g. red light cameras or speed cameras.

Questions and comments from the committee

* Dominick: Improving officer and staff retention seems to be a theme among the groups. Is that something that can be addressed through this funding? Retention comes from leadership and culture build at VPD and I’m not sure how that’s addressed through funding.
  + AC Nilsen: When people leave the VPD, we hold exit interviews. What we’ve heard is that the primary cause of officers leaving is the constant demand for responding to critical incident calls. So, finding ways to reduce that burden would likely help with officer retention. That being said, leadership and culture can also have a big impact on retention.
* Mark: Officer stress levels aren’t addressed as much as they should be. There must be more help for the officers to ease their stress levels.
  + AC Nilsen: VPD has had 3 suicides in the last 18 months. If you look at the stress factor of the department you can see impacts on mental health just by those outcomes. Leadership has been working on developing and improving its officer wellness program, but it takes time and money to implement.
  + AC Nilsen: VPD has recently started sharing a mental health worker with the VFD. Officers have been taking advantage of this resource and the outcomes have so far been positive.
    - Martha: Is providing this mental health care something that could be done by a volunteer?
      * AC Nilsen: Culturally competent practitioners that have the skills and background needed to meet the needs of officers are unlikely to do this as a volunteer due to the highly specialized skillset it requires. We’ve found it can do more harm than good for officers if practitioners don’t have that cultural competency.
* Dominick: How has recruitment been going so far?
  + AC Nilsen: Recruitment has been good, especially when compared to other nearby cities, but the issue is that we’re retiring just as many.

General Takeaways

* All groups identified the following priorities:
  + Improve officer retention.
  + Increase staffing, especially for NPOs.
  + Improve relationships between officers and the community.
* Two of the groups identified the following priorities:
  + Explore and invest in ways to reduce the burden on VPD (e.g. build relationships with community based organizations or investing in technology like red light cameras).
  + Increase non-sworn officer staffing.

**Levy Considerations (Eric and William)** (slide 9)

Eric Holmes described the basic considerations the city has when designing a levy. Currently, the City pays $0.70 per $1 on public safety, with $0.27 of that $0.70 going to VPD. Fire District 5 pays approximately $20 million to the City to support needs in unincorporated Vancouver.

The questions the City asks when considering a levy:

* Does the levy include what we want?
* Can we afford it?
  + This is a two-pronged test.
    - Even with public support of the levy, can we raise enough money to fund what we want based on the statutory limitations of how we can tax?
    - Can households afford to pay? Property taxes largely come from residential developments.
  + There is a structural deficit in Washington cities. Over time, the buying power of the funding we have erodes due to inflation and the increased demand for services as the city’s population grows.
* Will voters support it?
* Can we deliver on the promise?
  + Can we sustain it?
    - We have a tight limit on how taxes are managed over time since there’s a 1% cap on revenue growth rate.
  + People may expect to see results quickly after a levy is passed, but in the case of a levy like this to support the VPD, it would take until July 2026 before seeing increased staffing of officers if a levy passed in November 2024. This is due to the length of time it takes between recruitment, education, and training process.
* What are the tradeoff implications for other services in the future?
  + We have level of service gaps in other departments outside of the VPD. If we push for the entire $30 mil, how does that close opportunities for funding for other City departments?

Committee Feedback and Questions

Committee members participated in an anonymous voting and feedback activity using Mentimeter. The City asked the following questions:

* *Given where we are as a group do we think we can have a recommendation on a levy to the City Council by July 1* (which would be needed to get on the November 2024 ballot)?
  + **There was unanimous agreement by the committee that a recommendation could be ready by July 1.**
* Committee questions
  + Martha: What would a recommendation entail?
    - Eric: The City is prepared to come up with recommendations to go over at the next meeting based on what we’ve discussed so far and the priorities that people have stated during this meeting.
  + Paul: If we wanted more time, what would that pathway look like?
    - Eric: The current timeline reflects a sense of urgency that was informed by the Chief of Police. The City must pass a resolution two months in advance in order to place something on the ballot for voter approval. Extending the timeline would depend on how much time the committee felt it needed to move forward with a recommendation.
  + Martha: November is a general election and it’s a different voter turnout than during a non-general election. Is that something being considered?
    - Eric: The City is prohibited from seeking external advice on election/voter strategy. We do know that, because it’s a general election and because of the political climate we’re currently in, there’s likely to be a higher turnout than we’ve seen in a long time with a voter base that likely has some interest in public safety (regardless of political affiliation).
  + Marth: If the ballot didn’t pass, would the City be allowed to retry it on a different ballot?
    - Eric: Yes, they can. Frequently, organizations that don’t have a successful levy take some time to assess why it failed before putting it on the ballot again. One consideration on timing of ballot – some levy tools have a turn out requirement which means you must have a certain percentage of voter turnout. General elections help meet the threshold.
* *Are there other things you need to help inform your decision?* Responses from the committee are as follows:
  + How can we follow up on our recommendations once they’re made?
  + Financial split between officers, staff, and equipment.
  + Cost of technology options.
  + What the levy is or states.
  + What results can the community expect to see? Will jail funding/capacity impact effectiveness? And, can a phased or results-based approach be taken?
  + Aside from increasing staffing, what other means have been assessed to achieve public safety?
  + A public opinion survey before the election may help the Council get an idea of community views on the measure, which would allow us to reconvene with possible changes.
  + Are agreements with other agencies negotiated for cost share?
  + Lunch with Chief Mori.
  + Kinds of staff needed in precincts to help officers
  + How is all of this great work we just discussed going to get started? Will there be a reconvening of this group?
  + Is sales tax a possibility?

General Takeaways

* Currently, the City pays $0.70 per $1 on public safety, with $0.27 of that $0.70 going to VPD. The City must be thoughtful on how they invest their tax revenue, noting that the funding is limited and shared between many City departments and services.
* There are many considerations the City explores when considering placing a levy on the ballot, from whether it’d be approved by voters, whether it would deliver the desired results, and how to keep the revenue stream sustainable over time, among others.
* There is unanimous agreement that the committee will have an approved recommendation by the July 1 deadline.

**Closing and Next Steps (William)**

* William notified committee members that the next two meetings will occur on May 30 and June 13 and that they would be held at City Hall.
* William also reminded committee members that if they’re interested in being interviewed by CVTV, to reach out to him.

**Action Items**

* William will share some information about property tax levies prior to the next meeting.
* The City will provide a levy recommendation option at the next meeting for the committee to consider.