**City of Vancouver Police Community Advisory Committee**

**Meeting 3 – April 18, 2024**

Hudson Building Community Room | 101 E 6th Street, Vancouver

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

**Presenters**

* William Cooley, City of Vancouver
* Chief Mori, Vancouver Police Department
* Eric Holmes, City Manager
* VPD Sergeant Brian Viles

**PCAC Members**

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| **X** | **Martha Baumgarten** | **X** | **Jean-Pierre “JP” Parent** |
| **X** | **Paul Burgess** | **X** | **Cindy Reed** |
| **X** | **Gabriela Ewing** | **X** | **Dominick Rose** |
|  | **Mark Frazier** |  | **Kia Simeon** |
| **X** | **Lester Griffin** | **X** | **Destiny Trevino** |
| **X** | **Josie Hyde** | **X** | **Mayor Anne McEnerny-Ogle** |
| **X** | **James “Jim” Kirkendall** | **X** | **Councilor Sarah Fox** |
|  | **Sidney Morgan** | **X** | **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 #2 summary.

* No committee members provided suggested edits to the summary.

**Committee questions, comments, reflections and expectations (Christine)**

Prompt 1: What lingering questions do you have from our first two meetings?

Prompt 2: Is there anything that committee members might be feeling unclear or unsure about?

* Cindy: When showing the map of the districts during the last meeting, the City boundary looked like it didn’t include unincorporated Vancouver. Is data acknowledging unincorporated Vancouver as well?
	+ Mori: The VPD district boundaries do not cover unincorporated Vancouver.
* William: The City asked ZenCity (the firm responsible for the BlockWise survey report) to prepare more detailed reports based on questions asked during the last meeting. This will be ready to share next week.

**Continue Conversation about Staffing and Funding Considerations (Chief Mori & Eric Holmes)**

Eric introduced Chief Mori and opened the presentation portion of the meeting.

* Part of Eric’s role as City Manager is having responsibility for all parts of the City, including holding the Chief accountable for the management of VPD as well as managing the budget delineation to cover all other City services.
* The tax system that is presented to the committee will focus on the taxing mechanisms that the City has access to.

Chief Mori shared his perspective on investigations, proactive policing and staffing needs.

* It is his belief that police officers in the patrol division should only commit about 50% of their time responding to service calls, they are typically going to call-after-call. Calls can require various amounts of labor hours. Reports alone require a minimum of 3 hours of time.
	+ Having 50% of unobligated patrol time (e.g. not responding to service calls) allows officers to be more proactive through community engagement, stopping dangerous drivers, serving search warrants, etc. When there’s no downtime, that’s when you start seeing patrol officers making mistakes and becoming more brittle.
* The number of proactive, officer-initiated events have been decreasing since 2019 (slide 6). This happens due the increased demand for service that’s occurred due to population growth as well as new requirements legislated by the state of Washington that the VPD must follow. The VPD supports the new legislation, but noted that it does require additional resources that impact officers’ capacity.
* The VPD needs additional resources to change the trajectory of things.
	+ Investigations workload (slide 7)
		- If we wanted to investigate all cases, VPD would need over 50 investigators, which isn’t feasible.
	+ Baseline training hours (slide 8)
		- Just to become a police officer in Washington, it’s over 700 hours of training.
		- Every officer needs 24 hours of mandatory training per year at minimum, but it should be more. However, training of any kind take officers off the street, which is already overwhelmed.
		- In 2019, the PERC offered 80+ recommendations and half or so had to do with training and policy. On the heels of that, in 2021 and 2022 there was sweeping police reform legislation. Limited budget, and the lower-than-ideal staffing has constrained the VPD from implementing additional training opportunities.
	+ The sweet spot for a patrol officer would be 80-100 hours in training per year. This would raise their skills and capability to respond more effectively and safely to calls. This would help reduce police mistakes and negative community experiences.
	+ Records workload increases (slide 9)
		- Professional, non-commissioned staff are overburdened and need about double their current staff to meet their needs and reduce burnout caused by overworking and vicarious trauma that they experience as they process police reports.
		- This staff processes police reports, warrants, body worn camera footage, manages pistol licenses and pistol license transfers, etc.
		- As the number of officers increase, the more professional staff are needed to manage records and take on other administrative tasks.
	+ Staffing needs (slide 10)
		- VPD needs:
			* 33% increase in the number of commissioned officers
			* 50% increase in professional staff
			* Around 80 additional personnel total to meet about 50% of the current demand for service.
				+ This would require more than $30 million annual increase in expenses per year (in 2024 dollars) to meet this need.
	+ Increasing capacity for VPD will also help improve officer well-being.

Questions and comments from the committee

* Gabriela: How do traffic stops affect funding for VPD?
	+ Eric: Any revenue coming from citations goes to the City in general, not the VPD (citation revenue is largely used for operation of the courts).
* Destiny: Does the Neighbors on Watch (NOW) program help with staffing capacity?
	+ Mori: Yes. NOW volunteers are a big value-add for VPD. They:
		- a) Deliver mail between precincts
		- b) Help coordinate large events
		- c) Go on patrol and leave reminder cards about registering cars
		- d) Use vehicles that are equipped with license plate reader cameras to check whether vehicles have been stolen (note: volunteers cannot arrest people)
		- e) Act as an extra set of eyes on the street
		- f) Participate in Paws on Patrol
		- Among others.
* Lester: Out of the proposal for 80 additional staff, how many would be NPOs?
	+ Mori: It would include 4 more NPOs (1 additional per district).
* Josie: Out of the proposed staffing needs so far, how would VPD prioritize funding?
	+ Mori: It would start by hiring people (vs purchasing a facility). In the last 2.5 years, VPD has hired 70 people. If the VPD pushed hard, they could hire 50 in a year. Need to get recruits through the police academy and then working as functional police officers and eventually progressing them through the ranks to fill higher level positions like investigators. All officers go through patrol division first.
	+ Eric: How many officers did we lose last year?
		- Jaycee Elliott, VPD Crime Analyst: VPD loses about 18.5 officers per year (e.g. retirement, transfers, etc.).
		- Mori: In 2022, VPD hired 29 officers and lost 27.
* Lester: Are there a lot of people applying to these positions?
	+ Mori: Yes, and the numbers are coming in – but we’re running into capacity issues to go through background checks, physical assessments, psychological tests, polygraph tests, etc. It takes about 6 weeks right now from hiring until they are accepted into the Academy.
* Martha: How does that differ when you’re able to hire a fully trained officer from another jurisdiction?
	+ Mori: The timeline is much shorter (cut by at least 65%). Officers outside of Washington state must go to a 2-week equivalency academy. It helps when officers are hired in state because they’re already commissioned in the state of Washington. It still takes some time because VPD doesn’t have enough field training officers to pair trainees with regardless of where they’re recruited from.
* Paul: What is the percentage increase for that $30 million compared to VPD’s current funding?
	+ Eric: It’d be a 40% increase.
* Paul: When it comes to training and officer-initiated events, will that increase training hours and officer-initiated events?
	+ Mori: The proposed additional officers would help VPD get to that 50% unobligated time for patrol officers.
* Gabriela: Does VPD hire throughout the year?
	+ Mori: Constantly hiring.
* Erik: Does the VPD feel that people seeking to be police officers are anticipating it to be a lifelong career like it used to be?
	+ Mori: No. We’re seeing that the interest in being an officer as a lifelong career is declining.
	+ Nilsen: If we do well as a law enforcement agency, we’re diversifying what officers do (patrol, child crimes, elder crimes, administration, K9, drone program, etc.) to help mitigate boredom and/or burnout and keep them as officers.
	+ Eric: It is the norm that we’ll need to continue to recruit, train, etc.
* Gabriela: Hiring new personnel and having more officers on the street doing different jobs should help retain officers.
	+ Mori: That’s the hope. Want to make the VPD a destination agency more than it already is. Younger generations might be more interested in staying on the job with access to new technologies like the UAS program.
	+ Martha: Is there a documented retention strategy for VPD?
		- Mori: No, not on paper. But there should be.
	+ Paul: What is the link and the comprehensive planning process? Is there an intersection there?
		- Eric: It’s related to our population forecast. As we look at forecasted population over the next 10-20 years, that’s what informs the numbers that Chief Mori has shared. We expect that the character of the community is going to change over the next 10-20 years. We anticipate adding about 50% more to the population but in the same land mass, so a lot more density and fewer single-family subdivisions. That is a different type of policing and approach that’s needed.

General Takeaways

* Current demands for service, along with recent legislation at the state level, are overburdening the VPD’s commissioned officers and professional staff. Chief Mori has determined that the VPD needs approximately $30 million to help address capacity issues (by adding 80 additional officers and professional staff). Improving capacity will provide officers with more time to participate in more proactive policing and relationship-building with the community as well as improve their general well-being. The infusion of $30 million would increase the VPD’s budget by 40%.
* With $30 million, the VPD would prioritize hiring to begin the background check, education, and field training processes to get new officers on patrol and progressing through the ranks as soon as possible.
* VPD currently loses 18.5 officers per year and the need is an additional 80 officers *added to* the current number of officers, so additional hires and the development of a staff retention policy will be needed to make up the difference. VPD is always hiring though.

**Equipment, facilities, technology and training considerations (Chief Mori)** (slide 16)

Chief Mori provided information regarding VPD equipment, facilities, technology and training that addressed the following questions:

* VPD outfits police officers with everything, which costs money.
* VPD needs space to store equipment and train. They will need more facility space with an increase in staff.
* Technology (slide 18)
	+ Shortly after 9/11, the federal government decided that we need better interoperability for officers to communicate with each other and for the community to communicate with emergency services. This is great in theory but requires additional bandwidth – especially as more new types of ways to communicate between each other emerges (NextGen 911)
	+ NextGen 911: texting 911, sending media file or livestreams to dispatchers.
		- First Net aimed to address bandwidth issues. VPD doesn’t have the resources for this but would like to.
		- VPD is currently looking into a real time crime center where data is used to forecast where crimes may occur next.

Questions and comments from the committee

* No questions or comments were given by the committee.

General Takeaways

* For every officer hired, the VPD must also purchase items for them, such as body worn cameras, utility belts, body armor, etc., which adds up.
* VPD would also like to upgrade their 911 systems, particularly their bandwidth to make it more streamlined.

**Uncrewed Aircraft Systems (UAS) (Sergeant Viles)**

Sergeant Viles provided an overview of the UAS program and related VPD policies.

* Sergeant Viles currently oversees the VPD’s Special Operations Unit. Within the last 18 months, this has included the UAS program.
* In 2020, the Traffic unit was closing streets for 4-6 hours to reconstruct serious accidents. Drones could do this same task in 20-30 minutes.
* In 2023, the VPD developed a new drone policy manual. There were 20 pilots with 446 deployments and 179 captures. As an organization, they made sure officers were safety and privacy conscious and have been extremely transparent with how VPD was using drones.
* All drones have been registered through the FAA. VPD records drone flights from launch through landing.
* Under the current policy, they’re only used for exigent circumstances (e.g. fleeing suspects, extremely dangerous situations, search and rescue efforts, etc.).
* There are 20 pilots in the VPD but that isn’t their full time job.
* Chula Vista has mentioned that they’ve saved hundreds of thousands of hours in police labor because of their drone program. An officer providing real time updates using a bird’s eye view is a big benefit.
* Drone In A Box program
	+ The drone is housed inside a weather proof container and it is launched remotely. It has a range of a 2 mile radius and then returns back to the container.
* Gresham PD has done some implementation as a drone as a first responder.
* One unique aspect of the Vancouver metro area is that in order to use drones, they have to make sure they aren’t conflicting with the PDX airport airspace. The biggest limitation is that the drone’s altitude can’t exceed 400 feet.
* Vancouver’s UAS program isn’t currently funded.

Questions and comments from the committee

* Anne: Are VPD pilots learning on their own or are they getting formally trained?
	+ Pilots currently attend two classes for training to start (one 2-day class and one 3-day class with a private firm in Troutdale, Oregon). To keep things fresh VPD pilots also hold monthly in-house training with the US Cadre.
* Jim: Are drones active in the streets right now?
	+ Most of the drone operators are in patrol. For the most part, drones are in the cars when they’re patrolling. Not on rooftops or anything. There are 4 large drones that are checked out during each shift. The drone operators will respond.
* Jim: Whose discretion is it to launch the drone.
	+ Drone operators have to get permission from the Chief before launching. CRESA doesn’t dictate. VPD is learning when they’re most effective.

General Takeaways

* Over the last few years, VPD has been rolling out the UAS program to help support investigations and respond to exigent circumstances like fleeing, search and rescue, etc. So far, this has been a very helpful tool.
* The VPD develop a drone policy manual that is safety and privacy conscious. It also considers FAA requirements that are sensitive to the PDX airport airspace.
* Currently there are 20 pilots at the VPD and four drones. These officers train routinely to stay fresh, but it is not their full time job. The VPD would like to expand this program.

**Funding Mechanisms and Considerations**

Eric Holmes helped answer earlier questions about funding considerations and the potential timeline for onboarding new officers, if voters were to pass a levy (slide 21)

* The annual cost per officer is $354,555 in 2024 dollars (slide 20)
	+ Things cost more over time. An officer that costs $355k today, will cost about $433k annually by 2033.
* “Other costs” per year include other parts of the public safety ecosystem (slide 23)
	+ CRESA, courts, jails and corrections, and regional SWAT teams are shared costs among agencies such as Clark County.
* There are a limited number of tools to raise taxes in Vancouver/WA. The one tool that could be used to get that $30 million would be increasing property taxes. The total levy for the City of Vancouver (not including affordable housing) is $2.08 per $1,000 of assessed valuation. That, today, generates $70 million annually. To generate an additional $30 million would require an increase of $0.90 per $1,000.
* The law that enables property taxes also limits them in the total amount you can levy and the rate of growth once something is levied year-over-year.
	+ Revenue growth is limited to a 1% increase per year.
		- As we talk about adding potentially $30 million of expense to the police budget, we anticipate that the funding need grow 5% annually, which is in excess of the 1% growth rate limit.
	+ The City needs to make sure we don’t create a funding cliff after the first levy is passed. If that happens, the City would not be able to continue to support the increased capacity (e.g. newly hired officers).
* When considering a levy, we must also understand that there are many competing interests. If we commit so much of our capacity to support an increased police budget, then we’re constraining the ability to provide support for other services. If we hit a severe economic downturn where home values depreciate, then additional complications occur.
* (slide 19) The 80 officers that the Chief has identified are to help address the city’s current needs, not what the city will need 6 years from now. Going forward we’re forecasting growth of 4,000 people per year over the next 10-20 years. Since we’re more likely to grow in a more urban fashion, the types of calls police respond to will likely become more complex and more frequent.
* (slide 14) It takes 2 years from the initial background check to end of probation.
	+ Background 🡪 Academy 🡪 Field Training 🡪 Probation
		- The bottleneck is the capacity for the academy. Recently, a regional academy opened, which has helped, but there’s still a finite capacity. If we accelerate hiring, it adds to that backlog.
	+ To hire 80 staff, it would take about 4 years to grow the force by that fully.

Questions and comments from the committee

* Gabriela: When considering an increase in taxes that will be needed per household, is the City accounting for the additional taxes that would be created as more dense housing is developed?
	+ Eric: Yes, we do take this into account. Any time there is new development in the city, that is added to the tax base. The challenge that we face is that there is a 1% revenue limit on the growth of that base, so there’s a maximum amount the city would receive regardless of how much housing is built in a given year.
* Dominick: It sounds like you’re recommending that we use a levy to provide the increased funding for VPD. Are there other options?
	+ Eric: 75% of total city revenues to pay for general services are funded by one of the following funding sources:
		- Property tax
		- Sales tax (which is limited and sales tax is volatile. When economy goes down, sales tax goes down. Property tax is much more stable).
		- Utility tax (which is a tax on sewer, water, drainage, garbage, telephone, natural gas, and electricity services)
* Dominick: Is there a difference in levy rate between residential and commercial properties?
	+ Eric: No, it’s the same rate for residential and commercial properties.
* Dominick: If an economic downturn occurs, then we’ll lose money?
	+ Eric: We won’t lose money, but it will make it difficult to grow our revenues, even by 1% year-over-year.

General Takeaways

* The primary funding mechanism that the City suggests using to increase annual funds for the VPD is by raising property taxes. Other funding mechanisms include sales tax and utility taxes.
* However, due to Washington legislation, the annual revenue growth rate is capped at 1%, which would not be enough to sustain the increased capacity built out from the levy year-over-year.
* Another consideration is that there are competing interests for public dollars. Funding the VPD constrains what other services receive from the city.
* The VPD’s desire to increase their staffing by 80 only accounts for existing demands, not future demands. There will be an even higher demand in the future as the city grows.
* **Question for the committee: How do we design something that:**
	+ Meets the needs as best we can that fits within the limits of the tax system we’re in.
	+ Will be popular with voters.
	+ Keeps up with the cost – and impact – of inflation.
	+ Weighs the other programs and services that the City is responsible for providing?

**Closing and next steps (Christine & William)**

William asked where the Committee preferred to meet for Meeting #4, offering the Hudson Community Room or City Hall. The Committee selected City Hall.

**Action Items**

* City to provide sources to committee on how taxes work within the city government
* [Biennium City Council Workshop link](https://www.cvtv.org/vid_link/36407?startStreamAt=0&stopStreamAt=5103)
* City to send out Meeting #4 information, including agenda and updated location (City Hall)