**City of Vancouver Police Community Advisory Committee**

**Meeting 5 – May 30, 2024**

Aspen Room | Vancouver City Hall

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

**Presenters**

* William Cooley, City of Vancouver
* Eric Holmes, City Manager
* Chief Jeff Mori, Vancouver Police Department

**PCAC Members**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **X** | **Martha Baumgarten** | **X** | **Jean-Pierre “JP” Parent** |
|  | **Paul Burgess** | **X** | **Cindy Reed** |
| **X** | **Gabriela Ewing** |  | **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** | **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 (Christine)**

Committee members were asked if anyone wanted to make changes to the Meeting #4 summary.

* No committee members provided suggested edits to the summary.

**Activity Introduction (Christine & William)**

Christine facilitated a centering exercise.

**Gallery Walk and Whole Group Reflection (Christine)**

Committee members were asked to walk around the room and reflect on the committee’s priorities that were presented during the last meeting. They were then asked if there was anything committee members would like to add or emphasize, or if any additional questions or comments arose.

Questions and comments from the committee

* Josie: What are your impressions of the priorities that the committee identified, Chief Mori?
	+ Chief Mori: I liked what the committee has come up with, but I didn’t see committee members identify investments in technology as a priority.
		- \*\*Committee members responded that this was identified as a priority by some groups.
* JP: What are VPD’s goals when it comes to technology?
	+ Chief Mori: The overall goals for this levy are three-fold: Fill vacancies, utilize technology to be more efficient in providing services to the community, and have Vancouver be the safest urban city in the state. When it comes to technology, it’s about bringing more efficiency to the department to help free up officer capacity. Other cities have used AI to draft police reports using audio from the body cam footage, which has reduced the amount of time officers spend on writing reports drastically. The VPD may be interested in exploring something like that.
* Sarah: I thought we were going to take the priorities that the committee came up with and further prioritize those to help identify what funding should go toward.
	+ Christine: The idea is that the City has come up with a preferred funding strategy that considers the committee’s ideas. We’ll use that as a jumping-off point where we can start having that conversation about whether the preferred strategy is meeting the committee’s stated priorities.

**Desired Outcomes of Investment in VPD and Target Approach (Eric)**

Eric shared the desired outcomes and approaches to technology, facilities, and complimentary programs (slide 5).

* Policing the way that the Chief envisions it for Vancouver is a people-oriented effort. Creating the opportunity and capacity to do proactive, people-oriented work requires more staff time. Certain technologies could help provide the capacity needed for sworn officers to do that proactive policing.
* Slide 8 - For technology – today and for the next several years, there’s a significant opportunity to use UAVs (drones), which are more efficient doing certain tasks and have tactical advantages that would be beneficial for the VPD. For example, VPD currently doesn’t have an online report taking portal for people to file police reports, which would help free up resources. AI-assisted police report writing would help do the same. Much of the report writing that happens now, happens at the end of an officer’s shift during over time hours. Reducing that amount of time needed writing those reports would also help free up funds that are currently allotted to pay for officers working overtime.
* Slide 9 – Aside from increased staffing and investment in technology, we also know there’s a need for another facility, which would include a precinct, training center, and headquarters. Existing facilities are not adequate to meet the needs of the current VPD staff so this will need to be addressed if/as the upcoming levy passes and VPD staffing increases. There’s more work to be done on analyzing this need and cost for a facility before it would be ready for committee to consider this as part of the current levy.
* Something that’s been an ongoing conversation throughout our meetings is that while we have invested consistently in building capacity in our PD, the needs of our community and population growth have outpaced that. We are in a place for the demand for police services exceeds our capacity. For example, along the Fourth Plain corridor where we’ve seen a surge of property crimes, we deploy VPD missions to address that issue. However, much of that is done on overtime.
* We have casually referred to the desired level of funding for this levy as a mansion, I don’t think it’s a mansion. It’s more like a good middle class home. That’s because the reality of implementing the hiring and deploying of 80 officers will take 4-6 years. We think that with the correctly scoped investment, we could do upfront and accelerated hiring to get us into a position to get closer to meeting the needs and desires of the community. However, there are limits to what we can do based on hiring but also how much money we can raise and sustain.

Committee members were then asked the following:

* Do these proposed outcomes and approaches reflect your priorities as a committee?
* What, if anything, would you want to see added, removed or emphasized?

Questions and comments from the committee

* Sarah: One piece we haven’t covered fully is the community collaboration priority that was identified by the committee. What does it take for us to do more community-based relationship building? How many staff would it take to build those pieces? How much would that cost? For example, we haven’t had a discussion around what a neighborhood conflict resolution hub could look like and how much it would cost to implement. When I was on a previous policing task force, there was a lot of emphasis on not having community safety being fully reliant on VPD officers. I would like to have more conversation about that.
	+ Eric: Building our capability to do the bridge building with community organizations is something we do through the Neighborhoods Department. We are investing in those groups in conjunction with the policing work that needs to happen.
* Martha: I agree with Sarah and would like to see how that would fit within the staffing considerations. I understand that retooling the organizational chart may have costs associated with it to do that community-based work as well. I do think that the presentation captures the themes of the community priorities. The order of the presentation seems to follow the priorities of the committee as well. I like how technology can be a force multiplier, but the staffing must come first.
* Martha: When you’re talking about facilities, are you considering land acquisition?
	+ Eric: The City would first explore whether land currently owned by the City would meet the needs of the VPD. If that doesn’t exist, then then we would include land acquisition as part of the costs.
* Josie: I feel that the priorities and desired outcomes described in the presentation are accurate. Do we need to be prioritizing the elements of this recommended approach more? How does this levy play into this conversation when it comes to the jail and whether the jail funding goes through? How does this all come together in the end?
	+ Eric: The County owns and operates the jail. The City is a customer of the jail. The County is making interim investments in the jail to get capacity closer to pre-pandemic levels. They are also looking to have a more expansive investment within the next 18 months (if voter-approved). A permanent jail expansion is 5-7 years away if they complete their design work and it’s approved by voters.
* Sidney: I agree with the presentation priorities, but tagging on to what Sarah said, I’m thinking about groups that I’m a part of and community organizations that could come and bridge the gap. We should think about how we can invest in the resources that the community already has, versus putting the weight on VPD to do this. For example, the Southwest Washington Equity Coalition would be a great place to have these conversations. There are groups that are very willing to do this type of work and bridge those gaps. How can we leverage that and support them?
* Erik: I think the presentation priorities look good, I’m particularly in support of the targeted and complimentary adjacent programs that were outlined. That gets at the heart of the early conversations we’ve had as a group. We should be clarifying what roles the new officers would play and what kinds of work they would be doing. This would help voters understand that this funding doesn’t fund the status quo. When it comes to technology, I didn’t see traffic cameras mentioned but traffic safety is a desired outcome. I would like to see that reflected in the recommendation.
	+ Eric: Not having traffic cameras listed on the slide was an oversight. That will be rectified.
* Jim: I think the targeted approaches are great. With the investment into the AI-police reporting technology, would that allow us to hire less officers to help balance the budget?
	+ Eric: When we look at things like technology, they’re not a substitute for officers. They are a tool to help officers to be more effective.
* Mark: Are officers trained to deal with houselessness and relocation of unhoused people? That’s a problem that needs to be addressed. Are laws restricting officers in how they can respond to houselessness?
* Lester: I wanted to echo the need for organizational collaboration and bridge building. I would also like to know more about the benefits of the technology options that were presented, but generally I thinks it’s a good idea to invest in technology.
* Cindy: I’m in agreement with what the committee has mentioned so far. When it comes to technology, the governor has been vocal about providing grants for cities to increase their traffic cameras and drone programs. It’s not that those grants should replace the money we’re asking for but, who is responsible in the city for pursuing those grants? How can we leverage those to expand on what we want to do? If those funds can go to more training and equipment, that would free up funds for the levy. It would be nice to be able to touch on that.
	+ Sarah: As a city council, we’re regularly updated on grants that various city agencies have won. Could that discussion about grants being won be brought to the table?
		- Cindy: It could be a powerful position for the City to say that they’ve obtained grants that further VPD’s work, but that more funds are needed to implement and/or sustain a given program.
* JP: Like many committee members, I am also alarmed at the small number of officers currently on shift at a given time. However, my gut tells me that the introduction of AI wouldn’t lessen the burden on those officers that much and that adding a small number of officers wouldn’t be enough. When it comes to increasing staff, what are the roles and tasks for these officers and what would adding more officers do on a practical level? Houselessness is a prevalent issue in Vancouver, and it isn’t captured within the community priorities or within the targeted approach presentation. We’re going to be growing a lot as a community, when I talk to people, the homeless subject is top of mind. How we market ourselves as a city is important. My Portland store got broken into. In the morning, police called the board-up service and Portland has a grant program to pay for that kind of damage. For the first time, in 3 years, the door of my Vancouver store was kicked in. There was no support. Police weren’t involved, there wasn’t a grant program. There should be more support of small businesses in this realm as well.
	+ Eric: We have a strategy on addressing and responding to homelessness. We are working on getting a bridge shelter set up to help serve people experiencing homelessness more effectively and transition them to somewhere to receive services. However, homelessness does not equal crime. It’s the state of disorder that makes us anxious. There are a lot of addiction and mental health issues in the houseless community that the City is working on addressing too, paid in part by grant funding. We’re continuing to investigate more grant funding opportunities (note: grants are a one-time funding mechanism so, not a sustainable option).
	+ Eric: A property damage grant is a cool idea.
* Gabriela: I agree with the priorities presented. It’s important to reduce the stress and over work of officers by increasing staffing and investing in technology. Community involvement is also very important. As Sidney mentioned, there are many groups that are supporting the community that would want to support community safety as well. I also agree with Erik about investing in traffic cameras. Citations from these cameras could help with increasing funding. To JP and Mark’s point, houselessness feels unsafe. It deters people from living in Vancouver. What, if anything, is there to do about it? Washington D.C. manages houseless camps well. There are rules they need to comply with when they’re living in the city. They can’t have piles of trash visible. All their belongings are in weather-proof bins. They also have porta-potties nearby. Is there anything we can learn from their approach to houselessness?
	+ Anne: It’s interesting to hear about homelessness when we’re talking about VPD because the City has been working on this issue for 7-8 years. We explicitly took this issue away from VPD, understanding that houselessness isn’t a crime or police department issue. Instead, we created programs because of the certain conditions based on state law.
* Anne: What you have not seen is a chart at VPD headquarters that shows the faces and jobs of all the officers. As I look at the presentation, I put the officer in the middle of everything. We invest years preparing an officer to work in the City of Vancouver. It takes a lot of time and investment to train, retrain, etc. officers to keep them safe, retain them, reduce burdens, and give them the support they need to do their jobs well. Officers hold life. Anything we can do to reduce the burden on officers so that they are at their best and make good decisions is a top priority.
* Mark: How many officers does VPD lose a year?
	+ Chief Mori: From 2010-2020 we lost 10-11 officers per year. Since then, it’s been well over 25 per year. It’s largely due to officers aging out/retiring. 35% of the current workforce is eligible for retirement today. We’re hiring like crazy.
	+ Eric: New generations of employees are less likely to be lifetime employees. It’s unlikely that the standard will be people staying for 30 years then retiring. We need to be adaptive to the changing culture in that way.

General Takeaways

* Committee members are in general agreement with the desired outcomes and targeted approach that the City presented. With increase in staffing and investing in technology that reduces the burden on officers being particularly favored.
* Many members wanted the City to explore options for utilizing funds to leverage the work being done by community organizations that could reduce burdens placed on officers while also addressing community safety needs.
* Several members expressed concern about houselessness and were interested in what role the VPD played in addressing it. The City noted that houselessness was being addressed through other city programs unrelated to the VPD such as the construction of a bridge shelter to help transition people out of houselessness.
* Some members wanted to further prioritize the desired outcomes based on the committee priorities discussion from Meeting #4.

**Recommended Funding Approach (Eric) – Slide 11**

Eric shares estimated costs, along with the City’s recommended approach to staffing and funding VPD. Eric reflects on some of the questions he introduced at the last meeting, sharing what has guided the City’s recommendation.

* Proposal:
	+ Hire 80 additional officers (largely patrol and detectives).
	+ Hire 30 non-sworn staff.
* Today, the VPD budget is $76 million per year. VPD would need an additional $36 million to cover the costs for the hiring of sworn officers and non-sworn staff. Technology is also woven into that $36 million, but it’s a small amount of the budget. For example:
	+ The UAV (drone) program is between $60k - $100k to implement and sustain.
	+ AI technology for report writing is around $100k.
* Just to clarify that these estimates are based on knowledge and forecasts we have today. A lot can change in the next 6 years.
* Levy considerations (slide 14)
	+ Generally, simpler is better. If you have one issue (e.g. public safety), a single-ballot item is more likely to pass than having multiple ballot items.
	+ Price and impact per household is important.
	+ Clarity of commitment and confidence in delivery is key.
		- We’re reluctant to include the facility investment in this levy because the confidence and clarity for delivering it isn’t great now. We’re currently assuming up to $10 million per year is needed.
	+ Staffing + technology + facilities needs strain limits of available revenue capacity.
* There is no single source levy scenario that raises sufficient revenue to cover the expense of recommended staffing, so finding funding from multiple sources will be needed.
	+ For context, the City is experiencing a $45 million funding deficit for 2025/2026, which led to required budget cuts to all city service agencies in order to keep the city running, including the VPD.
* Viable scenarios include (slide 16):
	+ **Preferred scenario**
		- Voted only: Multi-year levy lid lift + Sales tax + excess bond levy (phased, not all on one ballot).
	+ Combination voted & non-voted: Multi-year lid lift + business and occupation (B&O) tax.
		- In Washington state, we have no income or corporate income tax. Vancouver doesn’t have a Business and Occupation (B&O) tax either even though it’s available. It’s a topline tax on gross receipts, not a bottom line tax. Income taxes apply to your income/profit. A B&O tax applies on the gross revenue you receive, even if you’re losing money as a business, you still owe, so it’s tricky. B&O taxes are used broadly in Washington, but not typical in cities that have border states/cities.

Questions and comments from the committee

* Jim: Would a B&O tax be bounded to city limits?
	+ Eric: Yes.
* Christine: Would it be applied to LLCs?
	+ Eric: That is up to city council to decide. There are many approaches to implementing a B&O tax and who would be affected.
* Martha: You mentioned that there are no municipalities in Clark County or neighboring cities that have a B&O tax. How have these taxes affected the business environment in cities that do have these implemented?
	+ Eric: Almost every city of substantial size in Washington has a B&O tax: Kelso, Longview, Tacoma, Castle Rock, Fife, etc. The business environment doesn’t seem to be affected but it is nuanced with a border city like Portland, which has a different taxation system. It also impacts different businesses differently.

Eric explains the details of a multi-stage levy scenario (Levy Lid Lift, Excess Bond Levy and Sales Tax). Committee members were then invited to discuss the recommended approach (slide 16).

* The Multi-Stage Levy Scenario would include a phased approach for funding, which would include the 6-year lid lift levy to start. Then, an excess bond levy to pay for the facility, and eventually a sales tax (in 2030). Year 1 would be a $0.41/$1000 and would increase by 3.8% every year for 6 years (the life of the levy). A renewed levy/funding mechanism of some kind would be needed by 2030 to keep up with operating expenses.
* Sales Tax is currently something that voters vote on, but there’s efforts in the legislature to make this a council decision without voter approval.
* Why this recommendation?
	+ It only requires a 50+1 approval from voters (this is also true for increasing sales taxes in the city).
	+ It’s permanent, diversified revenue.
	+ Can scale with hiring investment and growth of tax base.
	+ Initial levy provides “one time” funding for capital facility planning and investment.
		- Timing allows for greater confidence in scoping a bond proposal.
* Facilities bond will require a super majority and voter turnout must be 40% of the turnout of the last general election. So that affects when to push a bond forward.
* For the Levy Lid Lift, Excess Bond Levy and sales tax:
	+ Total estimated cost to a $500k homeowner is $28/month or $245/year to start. By year 6, the cost would be $50/month or $600/year.
	+ For an apartment complex, the assessed value per unit is $125-150k range. The payment goes to the owner of the property. Typically, they would translate that into a rent increase.
		- Gabriela: We’re seeing a huge increase in rents so that needs to be considered when it comes to how much this levy would impact multifamily properties.
			* Eric: We can do that assessment. There are some opportunities to provide exemptions on taxes (e.g. low income housing or seniors). About half of Vancouver residents are renters.

Questions and comments from the committee

* Josie: Does the City get to choose what to prioritize?
	+ Eric: Yes, and most places typically prioritize public safety.
	+ Erik: When the City goes to the voters on public safety, it cannot be redirected to other things. The funds will be dedicated to a specific funding source, which helps build confidence within voters that the funds will be used as promised.
	+ Eric: When we start talking about using funds for other things like small business grants, homelessness, etc. each additional element, dilutes the promise we can keep and dilutes the confidence among voters that the City will deliver on those promises. We need to be thoughtful about how to write a ballot measure (which needs to be 75 words or less)
		- Martha: The ballot measure should be written in a way that is iron clad so that future city councils can’t mis-utilize those funds.
* Christine: Does the scenario take population growth into account?
	+ Eric: The total levy rate is constrained by statute and constitution. In Vancouver, we have an existing levy rate of $226m, which includes things like the affordable housing levy, fire levy, etc. The recommended funding approach assumes the maximum funding rate at the maximum possible percentage so that we don’t exceed the levy cap while preserving the emergency contingency that the City has. So no, it doesn’t account for that growth (because there’s no room for it to under the statutes and constitution).
* Martha: Is there a provision for escalation in bonds in Washington?
	+ Eric: There are ways you could structure the debt but there are limitations with how creative cities can get. We would likely do a straightforward 20-year+ rate approach, which is consistent with past bond initiatives.

General Takeaways

* While not part of the preferred scenario, a few committee members were interested in learning more about the Business and Occupation (B&O) tax opportunity. The City explained that Vancouver currently doesn’t have this tax but that many other urban cities in Washington use it. In this scenario, the city council would determine who would pay the tax and who would be exempt. They noted that B&O tax impact different businesses and industries differently.
* The City clarified that no other local levy initiatives would be on the ballot in November.
* The City reiterated that it is important for the ballot language to be simple, defensible, and achievable.

**Presentation Follow-up (Christine)**

Christine requested that committee members reflect on the following questions before the next meeting. Comments and questions can be directed to William. Questions to consider:

* What questions are coming up for you?
* How well does the proposed scenario address the levy design questions and community safety needs?
* Is there anything about this approach that concerns you or that you would want the City Manager to consider?
* Do you think voters would support this approach? What questions or concerns might they have?
* For the City Manager, are there any potential risks or downsides to this approach that the committee should be aware of?

Committee Feedback and Questions

* Jim: Are other bureaus going through this? Are we competing with other departments for bonds and levies?
	+ Eric: The other departments will not be putting up their own levies/bonds/etc. on the ballot this year. There is a potential for other non-tax items on the ballot, but this would be the only tax item. I don’t believe any County levies will be up either. There will be other state initiatives on the ballot too so it may be crowded, but not due to local initiatives.
* Josie: What’s your level of confidence on whether you think it’ll pass?
	+ Eric: We’re looking for your feedback on that, but we’re doing our biennial community survey now. Included in that is a question about relative priority of police and preference on revenue tools. We will have the preliminary results of that by July, which would be in advance of the council making the decision to put this on the ballot. What we know through formal and informal engagement with Vancouver communities is that he top two issues are public safety and homelessness/housing by a significant margin. The next priorities are a desire to address transportation/congestion issues and to add more parks.

**Closing and Next Steps (William)**

* William notified committee members that the next meeting will occur on June 13, which will be held at City Hall.
* During the meeting, we’ll revisit specific outcome measures and make a formal recommendation on a preferred funding option.
* We’ll send an updated calendar invite and a short pre-reading handout next week.

**Action Items**

* City will conduct an analysis on the impact the proposed funding mechanism would have to renters if the levy passes and explore options to mitigate any undue burden on renters.
* City to send out pre-reading materials in preparation for Meeting #6.
* City to compile questions and comments from today’s meeting to inform the approach to, and content of, meeting #6.