

Date: June 18, 2020

Subject: Meeting Minutes, CUSP Personal and Public Safety Committee

Location: Creekside Counseling, Idaho Falls

Meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m. by Dr. Janet Allen, Committee Chairwoman.

In attendance:

- Dr. Janet Allen, Chairwoman
- Paul Allen
- Brad Landes
- Anthony Tirino (co-chair)
- Dan Weinrich, Community Advisor
- Idaho Falls Police Chief, Bryce Johnson
- Idaho Falls Fire Chief, Duane Nelson
- Not in attendance: Amy Gamett (co-chair); Carol Mascarenes; Rolanda Bjornson; John Ferguson

A quorum was not in attendance. One representative from the public was present at the meeting representing a grass-roots organization interested in Police Reform.

Chairwoman welcomed everyone.

Approval of minutes from previous meeting: In the absence of a quorum, the minutes from the previous meeting could not be approved.

Chairwoman turned the meeting over to Chief Nelson.

Chief Nelson:

Biggest challenge for Fire Department (FD) is mental health. Stated that firefighters are 3x more likely to die by suicide than by fire. FD struggles to get firefighters to take advantage of their Employee Assistance Program (EAP) because the number of sessions allowed doesn't permit a relationship to form between the counselor and the firefighter. Subsequently, FD experiences a high number of medical retirements for mental health reasons. Chief Nelson mentioned he attended the funerals of 3 firefighters last year who died by suicide. He indicated that the FD is working toward getting good help.

He believes better education is needed in the FD to destigmatize mental health. He is working hard to open the door again to Critical Incident Stress Debriefs, but noted that it's a special challenge because firefighters don't want to "appear weak" to their colleagues on the FD. To that end, the FD has established a TRUST Team, and notes that the department continues to "feel better" about the program, but it's still in its infancy. He also noted that they are working toward education programs for the firefighters and let them know it's okay to talk about their stress and related mental health issues, as well as what signs and symptoms to watch for in themselves and their colleagues. They are working to bring educators to train all shifts. The FD does believe that they have the support of the City Council and the Mayor in this regard.

Chief Nelson noted that the FD has physical fitness equipment for physical wellness, but need to view both mental wellness and nutrition as important for overall fitness/wellness, not just physical conditioning.

Noted that he expects that there are substance abuse issues in the FD, though he is not aware of those issues manifesting at work (i.e. employees showing up to work impaired). Nevertheless, knowing the issue is likely occurring, he emphasized the need for addiction/substance abuse support for the FD.

In addition to the mental health of the FD, he noted that they experience a high volume of mental health-related calls, such as suicide calls. Subsequently, additional training for firefighters and EMS to recognize and facilitate the support of mental health issues would be beneficial.

Regarding Safety, Chief Nelson noted that they have a lot of injuries while on duty, which costs the City a lot of money. He believes that physical and body awareness training that would be beneficial to support the reduction in the rate of injuries would be beneficial to help keep the FD healthier and on the job.

As the FD considers the growth of the City, some of the things they see and would recommend addressing are:

- 1) As Idaho Falls continue to develop “water space” along the greenbelt, but especially the bike paths along the canal banks, need to be prepared to respond to water accident calls. Chief Nelson specifically indicated the need for number markers along the canal banks that are similar to mile post markers, so that in the event of a 9-1-1 call, the caller can report the number they see on the nearest marker, which in turn facilitates the response time. Regular training on water rescue also would be beneficial.
- 2) Training to support back-country rescue would allow the FD to support Search and Rescue.
- 3) City maps can’t keep up with the addition of new addresses, which impedes emergency response to those addresses. A system for readily adding newly developed addresses to city maps and GPS/software would be very beneficial. **[NOTE: CUSP could check to see if part of the process for obtaining a building permit is adding the address to the city maps, and if there is a way to update the system such that by the time construction is complete, the system has been updated]**

FD acknowledges that it is not meeting national standards for response time, but notes that there are too many physical barriers that restrict access, such as rivers, canals and railroad crossings, that can only be overcome by establishing more fire stations, but which is considered excessive. Still, the FD is trying to reduce its average response time to under 6 minutes for ambulance and 7 minutes for fire trucks.

Chief Nelson cited the following statistics:

- 1) EMS calls increase roughly 5% per year;
- 2) Roughly 10,000 EMS calls per year;
- 3) Fire calls averaged between 2,000-2,400 per year for the past 10 years;
- 4) The FD averages about 14,000 calls per year

The 48 hours on, 96 hours off schedule works well for firefighters, however little is understood about the risks to the employee and public during the second 24 hours of their shift due to excessive physical demands and lack of sleep. Chief Nelson recommended to the City they conduct a study on the injuries and mistakes that occur during that period to determine if there is a pattern of schedule-induced incidents, which may lead to improvements. By observing injury/incident patterns across the whole FD, important insight may be gained that would yield modifications to shifts, specific training, etc.

Chairwoman asked about programs targeting kids who get in trouble with fire. Chief Nelson indicated that the FD previously had a well-supported program called the "Juvenile Fire Starter Program" that was intended to help firefighters mentor and coach kids who start fires on the dangers to self, others and property. The program has been allowed to lapse, and the originally trained firefighters have since retired. Though they have some firefighters who are trying to prop up the program, they need training. He also noted, however, that problem with the program is that it "doesn't take the next step" and that partnering with psychological services professionals who can also work "fire starters" would help bridge that gap, and Chief Nelson believes the program would be very beneficial in contributing to the safety of the community.

Community member asked about insurance that firefighters have. Chief Nelson noted that it's good health insurance with a co-pay program. However, he noted that it doesn't cover enough mental health visits, and compared it to Madison County which receives 25 mental health visits per year covered by their insurance.

CUSP member asked about data, and the Chief responded that they do maintain good data that can be made available. In particular there was a discussion about "repeat offenders" and he noted that they most definitely see such people. Again, he noted that if there was an opportunity to study the patterns and behaviors of repeat offenders, they could do a better job of getting these people the mental health assistance they need rather than repeat FD or PD calls.

Chairwoman asked what one thing would be most impactful to the safety of this community? Chief responded that the hardest part here is helping the public understand that Idaho Falls DOES have very real public safety issues. We do have drugs and gangs, we do have domestic violence, we do have violent crime, and that the problems of the "big cities" are no different than ours, and ours are proportional to our population, same as the cities. He believes it is important to be able to talk openly and honestly about issues rather than sweeping them under the rug. He cited COVID-19 mask-wearing as a good example.

CUSP member asked if the FD has a citizens academy. Chief Nelson indicated that we haven't had one for a long time.

Concluded that the biggest message to the community was to learn to listen to their public safety officials and take their message to heart.

Chief Johnson:

Began by indicating that the biggest killer of police officers is suicide, followed by violent attacks, vehicle accidents, and heart disease. The average lifespan of a police officer is 57 years. Mental health concerns is a big issue for the Police Department (PD).

At the moment, staffing issues are very real for the PD, and he expects to lose funding for some officers due to the cost of COVID on the community budgets. At the moment, he has 81 officers that can suit up, but based on the population they serve, models would suggest he needs 102/3.

PD responded to roughly 49,000 calls this year, a 4% increase over last year.

Crime rate is down 7%, whereas calls are up 4%. This is due to an increase in requests to “check” on community concerns rather than crimes.

In 2019, mental health-related calls were up 19% over the year previous.

Clearance Rates (crimes committed/crimes solved):

People Crimes – up 14%, in the 1,000s.

Property Crimes – up 1%

Society Crimes (such as hate crimes) – up 15%

Chief Johnson credits the improved clearance rates to better resources/tools.

Noted that Mobile Crisis Outreach teams and a Crisis Detective are helpful in mitigating mental health issues that are not really crimes per se, but that the PD needs a better place to take people in mental health crisis rather than the ER.

Noted that the government is starved for resources, and so “defunding” one segment of the government will really just amount to robbing Peter to pay Paul.

Community member asked whether it was even appropriate for the PD to use “military equipment”. Chief Johnson replied that he preferred the discussion be less about what equipment they have, and more about the appropriate use of that equipment, acknowledging that driving a tank to a Black Lives Matter protest on Broadway Bridge is hardly the right thing to do. On the other hand, their military vehicles has been shot nine times in the last year or so, and that probably saved police lives.

Chief Johnson reiterated what Chief Nelson said about Idaho Falls citizens not believing we have a crime problem. Community is apathetic about public safety, noting that when they held a public meeting to discuss their 5-Year Strategic Plan, almost no one showed up. It’s very difficult for the PD to engage with the community if they community is indifferent about engaging with them (except during a time of crisis, such as the Black Lives Matter protests).

Noted that Idaho Falls is above the national average for substance abuse in the community. However, he doesn’t believe that getting in trouble for addiction related offenses should “haunt” a person forever, and that we should have a path for people to clear their record if they get their life put back together.

To that end, he advocates for a Police Assisted Addiction Recovery (PAAR) Program. In this model, if someone comes to the PAAR and asks for help, they wouldn't be arrested, and would be directed to the resources and help they need. Such a program is in the PD's strategic plan, and the Chief is trying to get a foundation in place that can collect charitable contributions and grant money to support the program, as well as a canine program and officer mental wellness.

Chief Johnson provided the following 1 year statistics related to "use of force":

- 1) 49,383 "incidents" within the community (i.e. matters resulting in a call to the PD);
- 2) 2,538 resulted in arrest;
- 3) 122 incidents resulted in "use of force", which includes canine deployments;
- 4) 4.8% of in custody arrests include force of some kind;
- 5) 3% is the target

Have recently begun tracking racial statistics (to the best of their ability...determination of race is visual identification by the officer only as they are not permitted to ask). Because the only minority community of statistical significance in our area is the Hispanic community, this is the only racial statistic he has confidence in. Notes that 10% of "use of force" incidents involve Hispanics, whereas Hispanics represent 13.8% of the community. Subsequently, he believes that his officers are not targeting minorities.

Community member asked if PD allows officers that were disciplined and removed from other departments to be acquired by the IFPD. Chief Johnson indicated that lateral hiring was common among Police Departments, but that IFPD actively screens for officers with disciplinary records and doesn't hire them.

He noted that the PD does not want to discriminate on calls. The following statistics are a new one that he has only begun tracking 8 months ago, but he believes is important to understand:

Police-initiated contact (ie traffic stops or similar times when an officer initiates a stop to a citizen:

- 1) 7,600 stops
- 2) 23 were Native American or <1%
- 3) 1,060 were Hispanic, or 13.5% compared to 13.8% of the community
- 4) 6,450 were white, or 81.3% compared to 81.4% of the community
- 5) 122 were black, or 1.6% [NOTE: I looked up the demographics, and blacks constitute 0.77% of the population. Chief Johnson is disinclined to weight very heavily the statistics related to black stops because he doesn't consider the sample size to be statistically significant, however, the stop rate appears to be twice the representation of African Americans in Idaho Falls. I agree it's hard to draw conclusions, but we shouldn't shy from the data.]

In general, Chief Johnson believes that the police initiated contact is roughly equal to the demographics of our city.

He is concerned that some cities are seeing a retreat in the number of law enforcement with a commensurate increase in the rate of crime.

Chairwoman asked him what the one thing was that he would ask from a public safety standpoint. Chief Johnson indicated that he would ask the community to engage with them.

Next meeting was tentatively scheduled for Thursday, July _____ at 7:00 at Creekside Counseling, 550 W. Sunnyside Ste. 1, Idaho Falls. The meeting will either be in-person or via ZOOM, depending on the conditions in the community.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:30 pm.