

**Phoenix City Council
Public Safety and Justice (PSJ) Subcommittee
Summary Minutes
Wednesday, May 1, 2024**

City Council Chambers
200 W. Jefferson St.
Phoenix, Ariz.

Subcommittee Members Present
Councilwoman Ann O'Brien, Chair
Councilman Kevin Robinson
Councilman Jim Waring
Councilwoman Guardado (Virtual)

Subcommittee Members Absent

CALL TO ORDER

Chairwoman O'Brien called the Public Safety and Justice (PSJ) Subcommittee to order at 10:02 a.m. with Councilwoman Guardado, Councilman Kevin Robinson and Councilman Jim Waring present.

CALL TO THE PUBLIC

None.

MINUTES OF MEETINGS

1. Minutes of the Public Safety and Justice Subcommittee Meeting

Councilman Waring made a motion to approve the minutes of the April 3, 2024, Public Safety and Justice Subcommittee meeting. Councilman Robinson seconded the motion which passed unanimously, 4-0.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION (ITEMS 2-3)

2. Reappointment of Chief Presiding Judge

Chairwoman O'Brien introduced the item of the Reappointment of the Chief Presiding Judge.

Councilman Robinson moved to reappoint Judge B. Don Taylor III.

Councilman Waring seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously, 4-0.

3. Approval of the Neighborhood Block Watch Awards for 2024

Chairwoman O'Brien introduced Assistant Police Chief Charmane Osborn, Neighborhood Services Director Spencer Self, and Assistant Street Transportation Director Briiana Velez to present on this item.

Assistant Chief Osborn provided background on the Block Watch Grant Program, the 2024 grand application process, and the request for an annual funding increase for the program.

Ms. Velez gave an update regarding the Gated Culvert (Wash) Program. She provided the locations of completed gates and the installation schedule for future gates.

Councilman Waring stated he appreciated the work staff has done to include District 2 in this plan. He asked about the 46th Place and Ramuda Drive wash, and if there were any ongoing issues with the Homeowner's Association (HOA).

Ms. Velez stated the HOA determined there was not an issue right now but staff will continue to monitor the area.

Councilman Waring thanked staff for ongoing observation of this area.

Mr. Self provided an update on the Gated Alley Program and the process for identifying eligible alleys.

Deputy Chief Osborn recommended the Subcommittee approve a recommendation to the City Council for full funding for 151 applications received, partial funding for six applications, and to increase the annual funding for the Neighborhood Block Watch Grant Program.

Councilman Robinson made a motion to approve the item and make a recommendation for approval to the full Council.

Councilman Waring seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously 4-0.

INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION (ITEMS 4-5)

4. Fire Staffing, Hiring, and Response Time

Chairwoman O'Brien introduced Executive Assistant Fire Chief Scott Walker and Deputy Fire Chief Reda Riddle-Bigler to present on this item.

Deputy Chief Riddle-Bigler provided an overview of sworn staffing levels and recruitment strategies.

Councilman Waring asked if the data reflecting a “passed” result on the test indicated each of those applicants became Firefighters, or if they just passed the test. Deputy Chief Riddle-Bigler confirmed the data only reflects applicants who passed the test.

Councilman Waring asked if staff had an explanation for the percentage difference in the number of applicants who passed the test between 2015 and 2024. He asked if the test had changed.

Deputy Chief Riddle-Bigler stated the test has not changed, but there are three firefighter academies running in 2024.

Councilman Waring stated his concern with the declining number of applicants passing the test.

Assistant Chief Walker stated staff is aware of these trends and actively trying to address them through changes to the testing and training processes.

Councilman Waring asked if individuals could take the test more than once.

Assistant Chief Walker stated individuals can take the test more than once, and once applicants pass the test, they are placed on an eligibility list.

Chairwoman O’Brien asked if there are other factors that determine if an applicant is qualified.

Assistant Chief Walker stated yes, just because someone applied or passed the test, it does not mean they are qualified for the job. He stated competition for these applicants from other fields also drives these negative trends.

Councilman Guardado asked how retirements will impact the data presented.

Assistant Chief Walker stated staff does have a two-year forecast planning for retirements. He stated the current number of applicants and those who passed the test meet the current need, as approximately 150 individuals are hired each year.

Deputy Chief Riddle-Bigler provided details on the current testing and selection processes and the future changes including an online test option.

Assistant Chief Walker stated staff is excited about these future changes and moving to an online hiring process, as it will broaden the pool of applicants.

Chairwoman O’Brien asked if the online test would be scheduled or if the applicant could take it at their convenience.

Deputy Chief Riddle-Bigler stated there will be two hiring periods and applicants will have 30 days to complete the testing requirements. She discussed recruitment outreach and collaboration efforts.

Assistant Chief Walker provided information on staff accomplishments including staffing increases. He discussed unit activity levels, overall response times, and response times by district.

Councilman Waring noted the longer response times in District 2 and requested to see the breakdown of call volumes by district.

Assistant Chief Walker stated staff can add that data into each presentation moving forward.

Councilman Waring stated there is no reason for another district to call ambulances more than twice as much as another district. He asked staff to investigate this issue.

Assistant Chief Walker stated staff does monitor this data. He stated there are three additional fire stations in the plans for District 2, and response times are a factor in determining priority for building stations.

Councilman Waring stated Arizona State University (ASU) might be able to take this data and conduct research on why some individuals call 911 more than others.

Chairwoman O'Brien asked how long an average response time has to be for it to become unacceptable.

Assistant Chief Walker stated staff does not have specific cut-off, since acceptable response times depend on the situation. He discussed the overall transport activity trend and noted activity levels have increased each year. He discussed what the needs would be for staff to meet the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standard and explained how staff quantified these needs. He stated staff would need nine more fire stations, 19 more apparatus, and 222 more sworn full-time employees.

Chairwoman O'Brien asked if there is a formula for how many civilian staff would be needed.

Assistant Chief Walker responded yes, there is a specific ratio of sworn to non-sworn staff. He explained response time variations including a map of response time variations in District 2.

Chairwoman O'Brien opened the floor to public comment.

Bryan Willingham stated he represented the United Phoenix Firefighters Association. He expressed concern over the pay for new firefighters receive and the lack of resources firefighters have to serve the community.

Councilman Robinson asked if the trends in testing are consistent with other cities around the country.

Deputy Chief Riddle-Bigler stated yes, staff is collaborating with other cities to discuss this shared issue.

Councilman Robinson asked how effective affinity groups have been in helping to recruit people who are eventually hired.

Deputy Chief Riddle-Bigler stated affinity groups are a foundational aspect of recruitment, and mentioned they contribute to diversity.

Councilman Robinson stated concern regarding response times and mentioned his support for more funding for Firefighters to decrease response times.

Councilman Waring stated concern regarding the implications of the long-term hiring trends for the department. He compared the data to police hiring, and stated the decrease in the number of applicants over time is especially concerning. He stated there should be focus on recruitment in schools and asked for input from ASU on this issue.

Councilwoman Guardado asked why there are firefighters who still make 17 dollars an hour.

Assistant City Manager Lori Bays stated the compensation is based on similar entry-level positions from comparable cities.

Councilwoman Guardado stated she understood, but she believes this compensation level is the main reason for hiring challenges. She stated it is important to find other solutions since the City might not have the funding to raise wages.

Chairwoman O'Brien asked if the telehealth program had been implemented.

Assistant Chief Walker stated yes, but staff has not seen the number of participants they hoped for, so they are working to retrain dispatchers on the program and increase participants.

Chairwoman O'Brien asked if the general obligation bond covers the cost of the equipment necessary for the four identified stations.

Ms. Bays stated yes, the bond funds account for the cost of the stations and apparatus. She added that the budget projections also include the ongoing costs to staff the new stations.

Chairwoman O'Brien asked if the stations on slide 14 were in priority order.

Assistant Chief Walker stated the stations were in priority order.

Chairwoman O'Brien asked if staff would build all the stations listed if the funds were available.

Assistant Chief Walker stated yes, staff could justify the need for each station listed.

Chairwoman emphasized the importance of this issue and thanked staff for the presentation.

5. Firework Safety and Impacts

Chairwoman O'Brien introduced Assistant Fire Chief Tim Kreis and Deputy Director of Community Risk Reduction Jennifer Hill to present on this item.

Assistant Chief Kries provided background on Phoenix Fire codes prohibiting fireworks. He differentiated fireworks that are prohibited and those that are permitted by state law.

Ms. Hill provided the Fire Investigations Task Force data review. She stated the key takeaway was that fire activities increase in months when the sale and use of fireworks are permitted. She provided data on fire incidents, specifically during the New Year's Holiday and the Fourth of July. She described a three-step strategy to mitigate the risk of fireworks.

Assistant Chief Kries noted the Police Department also experiences elevated call volumes during the previously mentioned holidays. He discussed community safety points including keeping a safe distance from the fireworks, taking care of pets, choosing safe locations, and disposing of fireworks properly. He discussed staff efforts in community risk education.

Councilman Waring stated increased education might not cause people to change if they do not care about the rules. He stated this is a serious concern, but he does not know if these are effective methods to mitigate these behaviors.

Assistant Chief Kreis played an educational video.

Councilman Waring stated he understood the intent behind this initiative, and he thought the video was positive, but this is a difficult issue to address.

Assistant Chief Kries also discussed emergency response and stated the Fire Department is well prepared for these issues.

Councilman Waring stated his office receives calls about this issue often. He stated he hopes staff is doing everything they can within the law to mitigate these issues.

Assistant Chief Kries stated the staff is doing everything they can to improve this issue within state law.

Chairwoman O'Brien asked if residents could report illegal fireworks sales through myPHX311.

Assistant Chief Kries stated staff would prefer residents to report the issue directly to the Fire Marshal's office.

Chairwoman O'Brien asked when the Fire Marshal's office phone is monitored.

Assistant Chief Kries stated the numbers are monitored during normal business hours.

Chairwoman O'Brien asked if staff is helping residents understand what a safe location for fire work disposal looks like.

Assistant Chief Kreis stated yes, staff is trying to provide clarity to residents.

Councilwoman Guardado stated the Fire Marshal's office phone number should be posted everywhere and asked for the information on a flyer so her office can provide the information to residents.

INFORMATION ONLY (ITEMS 6-8)

6. Phoenix Substance Use and Overdose Dashboard

This item is for information only.

7. Police Hiring, Recruitment, and Attrition Update

This item is for information only.

8. CAP Hiring, Recruitment and Metric Report

This item is for information only.

CALL TO THE PUBLIC

None.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

None.

ADJOURNMENT

Chairwoman O'Brien adjourned the meeting at 11:41 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chloe Baldwin
Management Fellow