

WORK SESSION OF GREENBELT CITY HELD ON MONDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2021

Discussion: Police Reform

Mayor Byrd began the meeting at 8:00 p.m., which was held virtually via Zoom.

In attendance were: Council members Judith F. Davis, Emmett V. Jordan, Leta Mach, Silke I. Pope, Edward V.J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts, and Mayor Colin A. Byrd.

City Staff were: Nicole Ard, City Manager; Rick Bowers, Police Chief; Timothy White, Deputy Chief; and Bonita Anderson, City Clerk.

Others in attendance: Public Safety Advisory Committee Members Stan Zirkin, Laura Kressler, Cindy Comproni, Bill Orleans and others.

Mayor Byrd began by introducing Council members, the Police Department, the Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC), speakers, and City of Greenbelt staff. Mayor Byrd highlighted the importance of having a comprehensive packet containing background information for the discussion. He supported a proposed ordinance as a more permanent legislative measure, emphasizing the need for policy reforms and modifications. The Mayor also highlighted the similarities and differences between his recommendations and those of the PSAC. Regarding police reform, we are inviting input from all participants to ensure diverse viewpoints are considered.

Chief Bowers addressed attendees about the department's policies and procedures. He highlighted that these policies guide operations and that specific rules for body-worn cameras are outlined in separate general orders. He discussed the challenges of releasing body camera footage in fatality cases, which require thorough redaction and legal review. Chief Bowers also noted the need for improved staffing levels to manage the volume of footage requests effectively.

Chief Bowers highlighted several important areas of focus, including racial profiling and data collection related to traffic stops. He announced that the department is working with the University of Maryland to analyze traffic data from Prince George's and Montgomery Counties, with results to be reported annually. He acknowledged the challenges in tracking stop-and-frisk data, as the current system does not capture all relevant information. The discussion emphasized the ongoing efforts to enhance transparency and accountability within the police department while addressing community concerns.

Mayor Byrd expressed his support for establishing an ordinance as a more permanent legislative solution. He emphasized the importance of ongoing policy reforms and modifications, particularly highlighting the differences between his proposed ordinance and the recommendations from the Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC). The proposed ordinance aims to create a legislative framework that has the backing of some city council members and members of the public, while others believe it may be excessive. Mayor Byrd also acknowledged the commendable efforts of many police officers and suggested that the ordinance could incorporate elements from the PSAC's recommendations.

The Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC) addressed several important issues, including the need for body cameras and the staffing required for their management. The discussions highlighted the significance of making body cameras easily accessible and the challenges related to officers turning off their cameras. The committee reached a consensus on various points, particularly regarding the reporting of complaints, which underscored the reasons individuals may hesitate to file them. Mayor Byrd shared a personal experience from 2016, recalling an incident where the absence of a body camera during an altercation emphasized the need for accountability and improved handling of random stops.

Ms. Davis compared the PSAC Proposal with the Police Department's report on potential actions through general orders. She noted that only a few areas of disagreement required discussion, questioning whether ordinance legislation was necessary or if the PSAC could effectively operate through general orders with city council approval. Additionally, she indicated that the Police Chief supported most PSAC recommendations, with only a few areas needing further discussion.

Ms. Jordan commended the Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC) for their dedication and meticulous attention to detail. He specifically inquired about the police chief's response to the PSAC's recommendations and whether any of them could be incorporated into an ordinance. Mr. Jordan expressed frustration over not having received a comprehensive written response or presentation, noting that the detailed reports from the police chief might be difficult for the public to digest without an overview or summary.

Councilmember also expressed concerns about the accountability of general orders, noting that broad policy statements often lack the specificity found in orders that include explicit consequences. He requested clarification on the processes for modifying, maintaining, and reviewing general orders due to their complexity. In response, the Chief of Police explained that general orders are dynamic documents that are continuously updated. While some policies are outdated, many are regularly reviewed to ensure alignment with legal standards. Additionally, the department undergoes annual accreditation assessments to verify compliance.

The Chief noted that the development of new policies can be a lengthy process, often taking two to three weeks for review and approval involving various stakeholders. He emphasized the importance of training officers on new policies, particularly as they transition to criminalizing violations of state policies. Additionally, the Chief reiterated that policies are accessible to the public, which encourages transparency.

Mr. Roberts highlighted concerns about relying on general orders to shape council policy, advocating for a more robust and direct approach to policy-making. Ms. Mach and Ms. Pope praised the PSAC Report for its thoroughness, suggesting that the focus should be on addressing the more contentious aspects rather than simply agreeing with the chief's proposals. They also expressed caution regarding pending legal changes that might affect the city's policies.

The Chief acknowledged the need for refinement in the general orders and stressed the importance of adhering to accreditation standards to avoid non-compliance. He noted that updates to laws regarding use of force and de-escalation training are expected soon, indicating

that it would be prudent to wait for these changes before overhauling existing policies.

Further discussion focused on the implications of officers turning off body cameras. Mr. Zirkin stated that clear consequences must be communicated to officers regarding this issue. He emphasized the need for consistency in policies and raised concerns about the existing general order related to reportable complaints, arguing that it does not adequately address officer misconduct.

The urgency to address racial disparities in policing quite evident. Ms. Higgins and Dr. Rosado were advocating for changes to stop-and-frisk policies, especially concerning minors. The meeting ended with a call for public input, underscoring the council's commitment to community feedback in improving police accountability and safety.

The meeting ended at 11:08 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Bonita Anderson

Bonita Anderson
City Clerk