

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
PUBLIC SAFETY AND TRANSPORTATION
COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
JANUARY 5, 2021**

ATTENDANCE: Maria Valle, Co-chair; Mary McBride-Lee, Co-chair; Jeanette Herron, Michelle Lyons, Maria Pereira, Avelino Silva

OTHERS: Council President Aidee Nieves; Council Member(s): S. Suliman, E. Newton, M. McCarthy, S. Burns, D. Taylor-Moye (6:57 p.m.), E. Martinez (6:57 p.m.) & E. Brantley; T. Gaudett, Mayoral Aide, Acting Police Chief R. Garcia; J. Baraja, Police Department; Constance Vickers, Legislative Office, Lexie, Barbara, Savannah Polica, iPhone, Nicole's Phone, 203-414-0712, 203-257-2139, 203-257-6426, 203-526-3350, 203-609-2395, 203-275-6420, 203-414-0712, Bryan Bigelow, Thalia, Call-in User 2

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Valle called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. A quorum was present.

She said that each person would be able to ask one question each time. Committee members will be acknowledged first.

Council Member Pereira said for the record that she objected to the fact that she received the Power Point presentation only 27 minutes before the meeting. Council Member Valle said that when she arrived at home from work, she had sent out the presentation.

Approval of Committee Minutes: December 1, 2020 (Regular Meeting)

**** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON MOVED THE MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 1, 2020 REGULAR MEETING.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER LYONS SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 1, 2020 REGULAR MEETING AS SUBMITTED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Informational Session with Acting Chief of Police, Rebeca Garcia to provide an update on the Bridgeport Police Department policies, practices, procedures, training, SRO Officers, budget and crime and violence within the city.

Council Member Valle asked Council Member McBride-Lee to lead those present in a prayer.

Council Member Pereira asked if the attendance had been taken. Council Member Valle said that she had listed those present and noted that Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia was not able to join the meeting at this time due to personal matters but might be able to join later.

Acting Police Chief Garcia said she would be narrating a PowerPoint Presentation.

Acting Police Chief Garcia said there had been 24 homicides in Bridgeport during 2020. She added there had been a candlelight vigil held the previous evening. 21 of the homicides were firearm related, 2 strangulations and one stabbing. There were 139 non-fatal shooting victims during the entire year.

Acting Police Chief Garcia said having a partnership with the community regarding the violent crimes is critical. The Department has established a number of relationships with State agencies and Federal agencies but lack a solid relationship with the community. Nationwide, there has been an increase in violence.

Bridgeport has started a Strategic Enforcement Detail/SRO Community Engagements team. The officers will be located in areas where there are high call volumes, violent events or shootings. The Project Longevity Teams will be meeting weekly via Zoom to share information. The FUSION Center is a high technology resource center for the Department. The Intel Sharing has helped with focusing on the areas where there have been problems. Narcotics and Vice will have a change in their shifts. The Park City Communities will focus on how to deter crime in their communities.

The Department has started a gun buy-back program in order to get the firearms off the street. Flyers have been sent out to the churches and the buy-back center will be located at Sylvan Avenue. Buy-back will be handled anonymously by appointment only and gift cards for groceries will be available.

A bell was cast out of the previous guns that were turned in and the bell is now located at a local church. Acting Police Chief Garcia said she would like to have another bell made and install it in front of the Police Department.

Council Member Pereira pointed out that Chief Garcia had stated that she would take questions on each slide. Council Member Valle said she would prefer the Council Members wait until the end of the presentation.

Acting Police Chief Garcia said that there were 27 separations from the department. The total strength of the department had been at 365 officers, but there have been some lateral transfers and the current head count is 360. There are 49 officers eligible for retirements. She went on to give an update on promotions and the impact of violent crime on the budget.

Acting Police Chief Garcia gave an overview of the various training requirements that the Department follows.

Council Member Pereira said she was concerned that training was not included in the Strategies portion. She said she had sent a lengthy email to all the Council Members about training. She said she wanted to know the status of the Department in terms of De-escalation, Racism and Bias Training, and Community Relations.

Acting Police Chief Garcia said she had received Council Member Pereira's email and noted that if they were going to make any changes from the POST requirements, the changes would have to be approved by the Police Commission.

Council Member Pereira pointed out the De-escalation, Racism and Bias Training and Community Relations training had been mandated by the Council and the Council approves the Police Budget.

Acting Police Chief Garcia replied the material was covered in the POST courses. She added that if an officer is required to take a course annually, the officer will not receive credit for it and it would cost the City money to pull the officer off shift.

Council Member Pereira stated the Budget and Appropriation Committee controls the purse. She said the City Council had made their decision about mandating training and there should be no push back. She went on to mention a police shooting where the individual had been shot numerous times in the back in front of his family.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked how many of this year's homicides were police related. Acting Police Chief Garcia said that there were none. Council Member McBride-Lee said that the Council could not go by other cities where there have been police shootings.

Council Member Valle asked Attorney Anastasi to respond between allocating funds and spending funds.

Attorney Anastasi said that the Council appropriates funding for the Police Department. However, the Council does not have the authority to mandate the training for the officers. When Acting Police Chief Garcia provides the cost of the training, the officer taking the training does so during shift and that position has to be backfilled.

Council Member Silva asked Acting Police Chief Garcia how she felt about misconduct and how she would reprimand an officer.

Acting Police Chief Garcia said regarding misconduct, it is not about what she feels but the fact that they will not tolerate misconduct by officers. They take an oath and have a responsibility to do the right thing. There have been officers who have been reprimanded and have changed their behavior while other officers have been terminated.

Council Member Valle noted that Council Member Martinez and Council Member Taylor-Moye had joined the meeting at 6:57 p.m.

Council Member Newton said that he thought most of the officers had body cams and asked why they did not all have the body cams. Acting Police Chief Garcia said that the body cams are worn by the officers on shift. She would like to have all 360 officers with body cams. Currently Patrol, Narcotics and Vice and another department have body cams. More than half the department has body cams.

Council Member McCarthy said that the City Council cannot mandate this type of training, but the amount of money that the City paid out for Colorado Avenue settlement would have covered the training. He suggested that when the contract comes up, they sacrifice one holiday or sick day to pay it.

Council Member McCarthy asked where the money goes for the unfilled positions. Acting Police Chief Garcia said that she believed that the funding goes back into the General Fund, but she was not the one that would determine this.

Council Member Taylor-Moye asked if the 139 non-fatal crime victims work with the officers to solve the crimes. Acting Police Chief Garcia said that more often than not, the victims do not cooperate with the officers and the officers have to look to witnesses for information.

Council Member Taylor-Moye thanked Acting Police Chief Garcia for the work that the Department does for the residents. She reminded everyone that not all the officers are the same.

Council Member Herron asked Acting Police Chief Garcia about Community Policing in the neighborhoods. She said that they have been waiting for this for a year.

Acting Police Chief Garcia said that she wished she had the crystal ball that would give her the date. Some officers have been walking through the neighborhood. She and Captain Baraja had walked through P.T. Barnum. Back in the day, Acting Police Chief Garcia worked as a Community Officer. Through Project Longevity, the Department will continue to work on it.

Council Member Herron said that the Committee had requested the figures for training and those figures should be included in the Budget request. Acting Police Chief Garcia said that she has been restructuring the department and simply needs a bit more time.

Council Member Lyons said that there were grants for the Police Department and asked if any of the grant funding could be used for programs and subtracted from the Budget. Acting Police Chief Garcia said that many of the mandates have been unfunded and Ms. Vickers has been working hard to implement this.

Council Member Valle said that she would like to have Ms. Vickers speak about the status of the bill.

Ms. Vickers stated that the Legislature would begin again the next day. Ms. Vickers explained that they would be talking to the delegation about this because there are a number of towns struggling with the unfunded mandates.

Council Member Pereira said that she was disturbed by Attorney Anastasi's comments because he was in the Public Safety meeting and did not say anything. Council Member Valle asked Council Member Pereira to stay on point.

Council Member Pereira replied that Council Member Valle had asked City Attorney Anastasi for his comments. She pointed out that Attorney Anastasi was not a City Attorney, he was a

1099 employee. She added that Attorney Anastasi did not say anything about this at the Council meeting.

Council Member Pereira asked about the police handling non-violent, quality of life issues such as trailers parking on the streets after 10 p.m., others who park in handicapped spaces or complaints about noisy parties. These are non-emergency issues that are important to constituents.

Acting Police Chief Garcia said that all calls are important but they have to triage and prioritize.

Council Member Pereira said that there were Sector Cars that were not necessarily handling crimes but when they see violations, they should deal with them. Acting Police Chief Garcia said that she did not think that they were ignoring them. However, she pointed out that violent crimes happen all night long.

Council Member Silva asked how they track officers who are on patrol to ensure they are doing their job to the best of their abilities.

Acting Police Chief Garcia said that they have weekly meetings to review concerns. The Captains and Sergeants are responsible for their areas. Acting Police Chief Garcia encouraged Council Member Silva to contact the Captain for his area to talk about his concerns.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked how many officers live in Bridgeport. Acting Police Chief Garcia said that she did not have that information available but would email the information to Council Member McBride-Lee.

Council Member Lyons said she would like to thank Council Member Pereira for letting her know earlier that she was not muted when Council Member Lyons was speaking with her husband.

Council Member Lyons then asked about Chief Ramsey's report that had been presented some time ago and how much progress was being made. Acting Police Chief Garcia said that there had been an offer for a second report, which she is considering.

Council Member Lyons asked Acting Police Chief Garcia to send the Council Members a list of items from the first report that had been implemented.

Council Member Taylor-Moye asked Acting Police Chief Garcia about her recent patrol walk through P.T. She asked if the Housing Authority was able to provide assistance and if there were plans to walk through any of the other complexes.

Acting Police Chief Garcia said that she was looking towards re-implementing the Command Officers walk throughs that former Chief Norwood had started. She added that she had walked through the Greens just before the holidays for the food give away. Council Member Taylor-Moye said that she wanted to have some of the same things that Council Member Herron has mentioned.

Council Member Newton pointed out that the Council now would have some input during the contract negotiations through the Contracts Committee. He said that they could discuss including some of these ideas for the upcoming contracts.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked Acting Police Chief Garcia about the lateral transfers. She wished to know if the officers would be transferred to other departments outside of the City. Acting Police Chief Garcia said that the officers would be transferring out of Bridgeport.

Council Member Pereira asked about Governor Lamont's Executive Orders regarding bars and clubs located on the main arteries of the City. She noted that the last customer had to be served by 9:30 and the restaurant closed at 10 p.m. She said that everyone must be vacated by 10 p.m. and there should be no more than 25 people in a location. She wished to know why they are not closing down these establishments.

Acting Police Chief Garcia replied they have been closing down restaurants and bars when they see them.

Council President Nieves said that Council Member Brantley wanted to ask if the officers have national organizations that provides Professional Development and if they are encouraged to participate with them.

Acting Police Chief Garcia said while Professional Development is key but as an organization, she could not encourage her officers to join any given organization. Most of the training classes are done on Zoom now and they encourage their officers to receive training.

Council President Nieves reminded everyone that there were two parts to the body cams, the actual cams and the storage. The Department is required to store the video for a certain number of years. When the 2021-2022 budget rolls around, the cost of the storage has to be factored in.

Council Member Valle thanked Acting Chief Garcia for her presentation. She encouraged everyone to send their questions to either Acting Police Chief Garcia or to the Co-chairs. In February, they will be meeting with Fire Chief Thode.

ADJOURNMENT

**** COUNCIL MEMBER SILVA MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER LYONS SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION TO ADJOURN PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Telesco Secretarial Services