

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT  
CITY COUNCIL  
SPECIAL MEETING  
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2022  
6:00 PM**

**City Council Chambers, City Hall - 45 Lyon Terrace  
Bridgeport, Connecticut**

**CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Ganim at 6:00 p.m.

**PRAYER**

Council Member Newton requested a moment of silence for two Bridgeport residents who were recently shot, their families and friends. This was followed by Council Member McBride-Lee giving an opening prayer.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by those present.

**ROLL CALL**

The City Clerk Lydia Martinez called the roll.

130<sup>th</sup> District: Scott Burns, Matthew McCarthy  
131<sup>st</sup> District: Jorge Cruz, Tyler Mack  
132<sup>nd</sup> District: *Marcus Brown*, Rolanda Smith  
133<sup>rd</sup> District: Aikeem Boyd, Jeanette Herron  
134<sup>th</sup> District: Michelle Lyons, AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia  
135<sup>th</sup> District: Mary McBride-Lee, Rosalina Roman-Christy  
136<sup>th</sup> District: Frederick Hodges, Alfredo Castillo  
137<sup>th</sup> District: Aidee Nieves, Maria Valle  
138<sup>th</sup> District: Maria Pereira, Samia Suliman  
139<sup>th</sup> District: Ernest Newton

A quorum was present. Names shown in italics did not respond when the roll was called.

**City Council Forum with the Top 3 Candidates for Police Chief.**

Mayor Ganim announced that there had been a request for a Special Meeting for a forum with the top 3 candidates for Police Chief. He stated that there would not be any votes or actions taken during the meeting. He noted that the three candidates were all known to Council and these were also all top officers and qualified for the position of Chief of Police. He then turned the chairmanship of the meeting over to Council President Nieves, who reviewed the rules of the meeting with the Council Members. She said that they should not ask anything that may be

involved in litigation or involve personalities. She said that each of the candidates would be given 2 minutes to present themselves to the Council.

Captain Roderick Porter greeted the Council and said that he had served with the Bridgeport Police Department for 36 years as a Captain along with Investigative Services, Patrol Services among other positions. He has been a Bridgeport resident since 1989 and has a Masters Degree. He said that he had become aware of the environment that the youth are living in contribute to the violence. The Council Members are free to speak with those who know him, his communications, his ethics, his integrity and his relationships with the community.

In relationship to the recent Bristol officers who were slain while on duty, he acknowledge that there was tension across the country between the police officers and the community. He said it would be important to minimize the rhetoric with cooperation of the community. In Bridgeport, it will be important to deal with issues in the Police Department in order to establish good community relationships so they can take back some of the anti-police rhetoric and misconceptions that currently exists.

Acting Chief Rebeca Garcia greeted the Council Members and said that her family was part of the Bridgeport community. She said that she had been with Police Department for 32 years. She said that she had come up through the ranks and was the head of Internal Affairs for 9 years and also in charge of the Training Division. She served as Assistant Chief of Police during a very volatile time and has been serving as Acting Police Chief for the past few years. The Police Department has made great strides in the department and been able to decrease crime in the City by 31% compared to last year. They are continuing to work hand in hand with the officers to reduce crimes.

Regarding the Bristol officers, Acting Chief Garcia reminded everyone that the officers are dedicated and often don't know whether or not they will be returning home to their families. Bridgeport Police just started a wellness program that includes mental health services. She said that the community has been supportive and they have been able to change some of the negative rhetoric. The community and the Police Department need each other to work together. She added that she has a desire to continue to serve the residents of Bridgeport and the Police Department.

Captain Lonnie Blackwell was the final speaker. He greeted the Council and said that he has been with the Police Department for 22 years. He was born in Bridgeport and joined the Department in 2000. He spoke about his engagement of the community and stated that he later became the first African American commander at the Bridgeport Training Academy. He went on to speak about how he held the position of Deputy Chief in the Bridgeport Police Department two years ago.

Captain Blackwell went on to review his educational qualifications including a Bachelor's degree from Southern Connecticut State University and also hold a Master's in Criminal Justice from another university. He noted that he was always available to interact with the community and spoke about an NAACP Civil Rights and Leadership award and a minority business award among others that had been bestowed on him. He feels that these awards illustrate his character.

Captain Blackwell said it would be important to get back to the basics of community policing in order to regain trust. The strain between the residents and the Department is shown by the fact that there are only 291 officers in the Department and more are leaving due to the leadership. There is a morale problem which needs to be addressed. He stated that he could restore the community's trust and to treat individuals with respect and dignity which is where the Department needs to start. To reduce crime, it will require the involvement of the administration, the City Council and all the stakeholders. He spoke about increasing scenario training for the officers.

Council President Nieves thanked the candidates. She explained that each Council Member would be able to ask a question and the candidates would answer in order from the Chair's left (Porter, Garcia, Blackwell). When the next question was asked, the replies would be taken in order from the Chair's right (Blackwell, Garcia, Porter).

Council Member Herron greeted the candidates and stated that she was from the North End. While acknowledging that the Department was low in manpower, she pointed out that her District has only one patrol car at any given time. If there is a problem elsewhere in the City, the patrol car is pulled and there is no police presence in her District. She asked what each of the candidates would do to correct this situation.

Captain Porter explained that they have to prioritize the calls but said that he would take a few months to reorganize the street patrols. It's time to overhaul the system and have more patrol officers. Leadership requires hard decisions and the department needs to be restructured. He then gave a brief overview of how he would change the areas from three to two and increase patrol.

Acting Chief Garcia said that she also felt that they should restructure the organization. The North End is part of one of the largest sectors of the City. Acting Chief Garcia then gave the details of how she would address the issue via contracts, shift assignments and how she had taken officers out of Traffic, Special Assignments and other departments for coverage.

Captain Blackwell said that right now, they have officers on Administrative Service and they need to be back on the street. They hire officers to protect people, not administration. He said that he would be redirecting the resources in order to make the City of Bridgeport safer.

Council Member Lyons said that she had noticed that officers were overwhelmed when there was a car accident. Every time there is an accident, it takes an officer off of patrol. She said that there was a Vision Zero program which is geared at reducing traffic accidents by using a safe systems approach. She said that Stamford had enacted this program. This program saves lives. She asked the candidates how they might incorporate this program.

Captain Blackwell said that there were six pillars of 21st Century policing. The first step would be to have a meeting to develop a game plan, then the training would take place and the Special Service would review the program. Traffic calming can be installed at the site of the most frequent accidents and fatal crashes. He said that he would create a task force because it is a serious issue involving fatalities.

Acting Chief Garcia said that the Department had been considering traffic accidents and the use of speed bumps simply to slow down traffic. She said she would research the Vision Zero program for more details, but cautioned everyone that developing a Task Force might not be possible since they don't have the staffing needed to involve officers in a task force. She added that the various divisions could be made aware of this and have a sit down discussion with the community about reducing fatalities and traffic accidents. Once people are trained, they won't have to draw on Traffic Control so heavily.

Captain Porter said that all the departments and officers should be trained in these techniques so they don't have to solely rely on the Traffic Division. Focusing on where they have the highest numbers of accidents would be a priority so they had allocate the resources. He said that Westport has also started implementing Vision Zero traffic concepts. For Bridgeport, they would have to restructure their departments in a manner that results in more officers on the streets than behind desks particularly during hours when the accidents happen.

Council Member Newton asked about having officers who were doing administrative duties back out on patrol.

Acting Chief Garcia said that she had been discussing this and was thinking about filling some of the administration positions with civilians. They are getting ready to post some of those positions. She noted that as of October 1st, there had been a change in the law that would allow an officer to return to their former municipality department but this would not increase their retirement. She added that she had contacted some retired officers to see if they would be interested. It would cut down on training and orientation. Some officers have been moved from administrative positions back out on to patrol.

Captain Blackwell confirmed that this was already being done but they would have to streamline the positions. There are officers in the Property Room and the Evidence Room. There are officers who are retiring daily and the Department must take action. There are 16 officers in the training academy. This is compromising Public Safety and working together, they can protect the citizens of Bridgeport.

Captain Porter said that it was an excellent suggestion and needed to be implemented. He said that they needed to stop the hemorrhage of officers and create an environment so the officers want to stay. He listed a number of different divisions including the Fusion Center, the CFO, the clerks, and others where formerly retired officers could fill. The Department needs to address this.

Council Member Pereira then said that the work environment was not consistent and wished to know what the candidates would do to change this.

Captain Porter said that he was aware of the problem and said that there needed to provide opportunities for officers to move up or change their assignments. The Department needs to develop an environment that encourages officers to stay, but added that the health costs make it prohibitive. He spoke about his time as a Bridgeport resident and said that he understood the issues as a police officer and as a taxpayer.

Acting Chief Garcia said she appreciated the question and would put some of the information on the table. She said that there were officers that questioned why they were staying with the Department when they could go elsewhere. There are officers who are joining the force and being told by commanders to leave for other departments. Secondly, she said they do offer opportunities, but could offer more opportunities. Thirdly, they need to negotiate their contracts better. Currently, the officers pay 35% of their insurance and when they leave, they don't have any more insurance. Often an officer will join the department as a single individual but later go on to have a family and they can't manage the health care costs.

Captain Blackwell said that it was a great question and that the leadership of the Department was not up to par at the moment. Secondly he said that they needed to change the length of the assignments to six months, so that someone isn't in Traffic for years. This prevents people from taking opportunities. There is stress associated with the job and Captain Blackwell reminded everyone of the two officers who committed suicide a few years ago. They need to figure out how to make it a level playing field and encourage people.

Council Member Boyd said that the Department's troubles were systemic and asked how they would correct the issues.

Captain Blackwell said that he would start with an executive analysis of the command staff and executive body. They have to identify the strengths, weaknesses and external threats. It will be important to develop a plan to reduce crime and work with the community. Including the community is important. The Department has to understand the community's wishes for the quality of life, including traffic, crime and other aspects.

Acting Chief Garcia said it was a two pronged approach. Systemic change requires the Department to come together and efforts have been made to do this. People have to agree to disagree, but they also have to have the underlying agreement that the community is the most important issue for public safety. They have to do better and not have the negativity of commanders encouraging younger officers to leave the Department or anyone giving the media negative comments. There are officers that want to stay and others that want to return. There is instability because there is no actual Chief and Acting Chief Garcia said she was grateful that they were going through this process now.

Captain Porter said that based on his history, his administration would be based on honesty, integrity, ethics and stability. He said that he knows the Department and they need to fix the internal issues first. The community needs to be engaged in a serious way including accountability and service to the community. They have to open the door regarding the issues.

Council Member McBride-Lee said it would be important to know what they were planning to know what the candidates would do as Police Chief. She said that the Department was divided. She wanted to know what they would do to bring unity, not only to the Police Department but also with the Fire Department.

Captain Porter said that a Police Chief has to have integrity and respect. He added that when he left the Department, he wasn't engaged with the community. They need to engage the young people. The people who were in charge did not have credibility or respect.

Acting Chief Garcia agreed with Council Member McBride-Lee and said that when there is unity there is strength and cohesion. She said that there needed to be a change and that she leads by example. She said that she had started a focus group for the various divisions to hear their concerns were. Sometimes they will have to move in a different direction to move forward. There is a wellness program, advanced training and other initiatives.

Captain Blackwell said that as an instructor at Housatonic he challenges his students. One of the main issues the Department has is abiding by the motto of compassion and peace. Inhouse bickering and strife are going to be reflected on the street. He said that the administration has to show the officers that they care about them. Mayor Ganim took a step forward by adding more lieutenants.

Council Member Mack asked why they wanted to be Chief. Captain Blackwell said that growing up in the public housing, he decided he wanted to be a police officer. His uncle advised him to keep his ears open and his mouth shut, which he did. He worked his way through his education to become a police officer. As an instructor at Housatonic, he said that he was pleased at being able to attain this type of success since he was the child of a single parent. He aspired to be a successful police officer and looked forward to being a Police Chief for the City of Bridgeport.

Acting Chief Garcia said that her background was via corporate America. She was asked to take the Department over at a very volatile time where there was a major fracture in relationships. She said that there were officers who encouraged her to apply. There are members of her family involved in law enforcement. Her sister retired from Corrections after 20 years. She is engaged in the community. Acting Chief Garcia believes Mayor Ganim's mantra of "Bridgeport is getting better". She is part of the change and committed her life to the Department for years.

Captain Porter said that being a police officer was not something he set out to do. As he advanced through the ranks, he was encouraged by other officers to continue moving forward. There are officers who told him that he needed to try for Police Chief.

Council Member McCarthy asked about the cooperation between the City Department and outside agencies.

Captain Porter said that it would be important to reach out to the University of Bridgeport, Housatonic and the hospitals, which have campuses and expertise that the Department can tap into. There are many resources in Bridgeport like Liberation Program or the Health Department. The officers are getting the job done and crime is going down, despite the issues.

Acting Chief Garcia said that in the past they had received assistance from other agencies and mentioned a number of programs that had been held to reduce crime in various locations like Trumbull Gardens. The Department is partnering with the surrounding towns and giving them access to the Fusion Center with one goal in mind, reducing crime.

Captain Blackwell said that the officers do a terrific job, but the officers are tired. He spoke about the number of officer available. Having outside assistance from other agencies is invaluable. He spoke about the George Floyd tragedy and the Park Green incident. This is about the safety of the citizens of Bridgeport. It will be important to get back to the basic community policing and patrol.

Council Member Burns thanked the candidates for applying for the position. He asked about their vision, talents and goals for the office.

Captain Blackwell said that going back 20 years, they would see Captain Blackwell at community events, and motivating the residents. He said that there was a mis conception about the police being political. His job as an officer was to make sure that the public was safe. That's not politics. It important to make the City the safest city possible.

Acting Chief Garcia said effecting the change would come from her 32 years in the Department and working with Civil Service and many other Department. A transformational leader will be able to go downstairs and talk with the Patrol Division, which is what she does. It is important to iron out the difficult times when they have issues, such as interventions with the youth, who are the future of the City. It can't just be a philosophy or a vision. She has been involved all the time.

Captain Porter said that it would involve ethics and integrity and who has the qualities to encourage individuals to follow their lead. Without integrity, no one will follow the leader. All of his work has been focused on being better and being a servant leader. He does not have to attend every event, but his people have to be there.

Council Member Hodges spoke about an individual who died in a car accident. He asked why they needed tinted windows in the patrol cars.

Acting Chief Garcia said the tinted windows were installed following a number of assassinations of law enforcement officers. Individuals would walk up to the officers who were sitting in their cars, filling out reports, and shoot the officers. It is for the safety of the officers. She noted that the officers often have their windows open to hear what is going on since they have a radio on their hip, the dispatch radio and possibly a cell phone going. She said that she understands and it is taught at the academy.

Captain Blackwell said it goes back to the concept of community policing. He said that he would create Civilian Review Boards that would address issues like this. Officers are public servants and if the community does not want tinted windows, then the Department should not spend money on tinted windows. The residents should have a voice in the decisions like this.

Captain Porter said that when he received his patrol car, there was no tinted windows. He was asked if he wanted tinted windows and he declined. He agrees with Captain Blackwell that if the community does not want tinted windows, then the Department should not spend money on tinted windows. It is important to see and be seen by the community. Officers are in the car too much and they need to be outside, interacting with the residents.

Council Member Cruz said that Captain Blackwell had always been responsive. He added that he knew that Chief Garcia was working hard and that Captain Porter had also been responsive. He expressed his concerns over some issues that had been ongoing for years. He said that it was important to have face to face interactions. He spoke about engagement of the community and gave several examples. He asked how the candidates would keep the rank and file officers encourage and motivated.

Captain Porter said that Council Member Cruz was correct and that it would be important to have consistent leaders who create a system that will continue beyond their time. Without that, they cannot deal with systemic problems.

Acting Chief Garcia said that she understood and there had been an Enforcement Team assembled by a previous Chief. She reminded everyone that there were contract policies that they have to follow. The commanders need to discuss the vision of the Department. They also need to be aware of the concerns of the officers. There will be controversy and they need to learn from the community.

Captain Blackwell said that the Bridgeport Police Department needs to see a paradigm shift. They can't have two cultures, the haves and the have nots. People want the same opportunities for career development. Those who are not motivated today end up leaving the Department. He spoke about quality and quantity. Most of the complaints from the Council have to do with communication and about officers focusing on doing their jobs. They have to focus on patrol.

The candidates were asked about police brutality, the subsequent lawsuits and how they would address the issue.

Acting Chief Garcia said that as a taxpayer of the City, she understood where the Council Member was coming from. She said that there needed to be accountability and that additional training was key to the problem. This will be handled by building relationships with the community and letting the young people know that the police are not the enemy. She spoke about re-instituting the Explorer's program to help the youth learn about career paths. The training academy has started a criminal justice program to educate people about the criminal justice system. Working together, the community and the Department can implement training, accountability and education.

Captain Blackwell said the lawsuits would reflect on him as Police Chief. Part of the issue is that the community does not believe that the Police Department is compassionate. This has to change. It's not enough to see the residents in a traumatic situation. They have to see them at other times, also. The Department needs to control the narrative.

Captain Porter said that as Police Chief, he would set the tone and the officers would follow him. It will also be important to have additional resources available. The Department needs to be people orientated. They just can't say the words, they have to act the words out.



Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia asked about providing stability so that the residents get to know the officers and get to talk with the officers about issues. She said that it would be important to treat everyone equality and provide training for the new officers. She asked how they would make the Department more inclusive.

Captain Porter said that Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia was correct and that they had to think about all the residents, but noted that there were areas where crime occurs more frequently. He noted that they had worked to make the alliance with Sacred Heart better. They have worked to make things better at UB and Housatonic also. He added that he would work to make things more efficient. However speeding through Black Rock is different from other types of incidents that happen elsewhere. They can't address all the issues in the entire city, but they can work on it.

Acting Chief Garcia said that she would be re-districting the various sectors. This would include the reassignment of cars, what the districts are composed and how to balance public safety. Call prioritization is important, so that will allow the officers to get out of the car and interact with the community. They know the hot spots in the city. She said that she understood about the behaviors that occur at 2 a.m. in the morning and had recently spoken with Chief McNamara about this. It's not fair to the other residents to endure these types of disturbances. These are quality of life issues.

Captain Blackwell said he heard Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia's concerns and apologized for not being as effective in her area as they have in others. He said that he planned to have a survey of the area so everyone's voices can be heard. He spoke about reinstating a program that would bring back neighborhood watches and other types of security measures. They need to connect to the community, rather than sending someone to the NRZ or other groups. There needs to be a comprehensive plan that everyone follows.

### **RECESS**

Council President Nieves announced a short recess. She called the meeting back to order seven minutes later.

Council Member Pereira said that there were many issues that residents cared about which were under the jurisdiction of the Police Department like speeding, noise, tractor trailers parking on residential streets, dirt bikes, ATVs, vehicles parked in front of residents that don't move in three months. She said that residents feel that when they complained, the police did not handle it effectively.

Captain Blackwell said that as Police Chief, he would create a Quality of Life Response team to assign to deal with these issues. He said that he would not want to wait 6 to 8 hours for a response. Instead of reacting to issues, they should have training and be consistent and sustainable. He gave the details and said that they would have to enlist the community's help with this. Crime is not just about crime itself, but about social disorder and the quality of life. This will help people sleep better at night.

Acting Chief Garcia said there were many different types of crime that the Department deals with and quality of life impacts people in their homes. She has spoken with some Council Members about identifying a location where the tractor trailers can be parked or abandoned trucks or boats can be put before disposal. While violent crime takes the focus, they have to remember to focus on quality of life. A number of abandoned boats were just removed.

Captain Porter said that quality of life issues prevents other, more serious issues from arising. It will be one of his priorities. He said that the residents deserve to have the same quality of life that their neighboring towns have. Every Thursday night, he hears the racing vehicles on Huntington Turnpike. This requires enforcement. Regarding the tractor trailers, they need to be addressed. He mentioned the blight issues and said they work with the BCC on addressing those issues.

Council Member Lyons said that Council Members Cruz, Pereira and Vizzo-Paniccia had touched on many of the topics she wished to hear about. She said that during a recent call, she had met a new officer who was kind and concerned. The officer gave her some suggestions regarding how to handle the situation. In the past, the Department would assign new officers to patrol with veteran officers. This made a difference in her situation and it would make a big difference in the community's relationship with the Department.

Captain Porter said that it does make a difference. The new officers are much more engaged and more educated. He said that the new officers would be put out on the street and walk for the first year, so they become more familiar with the community. They will not see a car for 2 years. They need to engage the community.

Acting Chief Garcia said some officers are better with the community. She said that she would continue to empower the new officer in the high crime areas to engage the community. The officers have been empowered and ended up engaging the community by coming in on their time off to community events. The community appreciates this.

Captain Blackwell asked Council Member Lyons to send him the officer's name. He added that at the Bridgeport Training Academy, he has officers walking the area and introducing themselves to the residents. He used Newfield Park for training and there was a lot of opposition, but it was considered a hot spot at that time. He was encouraged to hear the story. He said that they also work with cultural issues and play basketball with the kids.

Council Member Mack asked what will motivate the candidates to keep going during challenging times.

Captain Blackwell said that he does not doubt himself and encouraged by those he loves. He is encouraged by the students he teaches, those at Trumbull Gardens. He's come too far to look backwards as a child raised by a single parent. He is encourage to interact with students, residents and other individuals. He encourages others to become a police officer like he did in 2000.

Acting Chief Garcia said her encouragement comes making changes, seeing progress and doing positive things for the community. Being able to those in the community helps. When times were tough, she reminded herself to keep moving forward because it's not about her or officers, but about the community. She had to lead by example and rebuild bridges that were fractured in the past. She said that she encouraged by the look on kids' faces when they find out she is the Chief or the boss. Her family encourages her and her relationships with others.

Captain Porter said he had been encouraged by a number of things. He explained that he was a fighter and keeps moving forward.

Council Member Newton said that he wished that they would take the ideas that they have been hearing and implement them.

Captain Porter said that he would answer that. He said that he said that he had retired because he felt that he couldn't move forward in his position. He then spoke about Patrol and how they should bring the ideology and the vision to all the divisions.

Acting Chief Garcia said there were many officers in the Department that had a lot to offer. Ideas are shared, but they have agreed to disagree. She said that she has often said she doesn't make decisions based on personal feelings. She looks for ideas that helps her Department. The silos of excellence need to be broken down so that everyone works together. There needs to be a 100% commitment to the Department. They should be able to learn and work together.

Captain Blackwell said that he was concerned about the community. Great ideas are nice. However, when he is on patrol, his major concern is suppressing crime and helping the residents live better in the City with quality of life issues. He would like to make Bridgeport the safest City in the nation, but that means the officers need to be effective in the communities, including savings lives. He said that as Chief of Police he will clarify the mission statement.

Council Member McCarthy asked about the Police Union and discipline. He spoke about his recent trip to Jackson, Mississippi.

Captain Blackwell said that the unions has statutory regulations regarding the officers and supervisors. He said that the only law enforcement union for supervisors that he was aware of was for the State Police. Something like this could end up with separate units for captains, sergeants and lieutenants. He explained that one of the most notable issues was the fact that a sergeant could investigate a police captain or lieutenant. This could be reviewed if there were civilian review board. He also noted that he had concerns about anonymous complaints to Internal Affairs. This could lead to conflicts of interest. However, Captain Blackwell said that in terms of the union, the supervisors don't really have a say at all.

Acting Chief Garcia said there needs to be a separation. She mentioned that she was a sergeant in Internal Affairs and performed investigations for a year. Her concern was that if there were members of the same union working on a disciplinary issue, who would the union protect? At the end of the day, both individuals still belong to the same union. She said that it would be

imperative to have executive management separate from the unions. Administration should have a separate union from the officers.

Captain Porter said agreed and said that he had thought about this. He said that if the officers were trained in values, integrity and honesty, there would not be an issue. There could be a conflict if there were two members involved in a situation. However, he believe that it could be done. Regarding IA, he said that there had always been anonymous tips.

Council Member Burns asked the candidates if they felt they were qualified lead the effort to design and build a new Police station.

Captain Porter said that they would need an architect to help with the design of the building. He might be able to make a suggestion, but in truth, they need a CFO to help with that. The design should be left to experts.

Acting Chief Garcia said she did not have the architectural savvy to design a new station, but would go to a Police Chief's organization where other chiefs have recently overseen the construction of new stations. She has already spoken with some of them, and one thing that needs to be addressed is needs assessment. The Department should be a one stop shop. The officers or the residents should not have to go to one place for an traffic report, another for an accident report or somewhere to obtain the documents they need. The residents should be able to say what they would like to see, but also should understand that they are the ones who provide the money for the Department.

Captain Blackwell said he did not have expertise in building a new station, but the first thing that he would do is go to the community and then assess the situation. He would hire professional services and make a collective decision. They need a better relationship with the officers and to address their wellness. He said that Pastor Gaston was their chaplain and should have his own office, along with a staff psychologist. He mentioned the two officers that committed suicide a number of years ago and they need to be serious about wellness.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked what the candidates would do to change the fact that during the exit interview, officers often cite the cost of insurance.

Captain Blackwell said that the Department was at a critical junction regarding retention since they only have 291 officers in the Department rather that 425 officers. It is a strain on the community, the citizens and crime. He spoke about a recent incident in the last week where 8 officers were pulled from other duties to address the issue. 48 officers left the Department in 2022. Half of them were retiring.

Acting Chief Garcia said she had been conducting exit interviews because the officers that were leaving wanted to talk to her. She said that she had a good relationship, but the officers told her that they wanted to stay, but couldn't afford to. She added that some told her that if they went to another town, their chances of being involved in a critical incident was much less. The Defund the Police issue along with the Police Accountability issue are major concerns for the officers. Regarding the insurance, Acting Chief Garcia said she was part of the negotiation team that

works with the unions and felt that they have good discussions. Many of the officers said that they were very excited to know that she was applying for the permanent Chief position. There were 67 officers eligible for retirement and 35 officers eligible since 2021.

Captain Porter said that they were talking about the loss of patrol officers, but they need to address the issues. He said that they should have a panel doing the exit interviews. The other administrators need to know why the officers are leaving. Over a number years, Bridgeport did not hire officers, along with other departments nationwide, and now those hired in the 1990s are getting ready to retire. The classes in the 1990s were large classes and they had better pensions back then.

Council Member Hodges said that he was concerned about safety in the downtown area. After a certain time of night, it seems to become a high crime area when the clubs are closing. He added that nationally, many cities are dealing with the same issues in their downtown areas.

Captain Porter said that the downtown area is the hub of the city and the concentrated area for development. They want a vibrant city, but the crime needs to be addressed. He suggested having a sergeant and six officers located downtown to deal with the issues. They want more police presence downtown.

Acting Chief Garcia said downtown was an attraction with the train service and other transportation. She has details assigned to downtown and has spoken with business owners who have been passing beer through the door to those on the street. That can't continue. The Traffic Division needs to be there on Friday, Saturday and Sundays to take action when there are problems. She said that she had spoken with DSSD about dealing with parties involving substance abuse or similar issues.

Captain Blackwell said that downtown needs attention and the residents feel it is out of control. When he was assigned to Traffic, they spent a major portion of time in downtown. They can't do anything that isn't sustainable and expect results. They need to assign officers on a regular basis, rather than a random basis.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia asked about another state's program where the officers have access to a place to talk about incidents. She spoke about the public safety concerns, which is nationwide and mentioned how personalities might play into the assignment of overtime and divisions. It will be very important to work together.

Council President Nieves asked about the overtime issue. She asked how the candidate would address the issues of the overtime budget and hold the line with department expenses and other budgets.

Captain Blackwell said that the staffing studies show the budgetary status of the department but added that this would include the allocation of resources. This is also based on data from the Emergency Services Division. It will be important to gain control of the Kronos software and mandate that only the commanders can authorize overtime. Currently, there are sergeants and other administration that can authorize their own overtime. It is not an effective way to manage

the budget. He spoke about getting the officers out from behind desks and back into patrol cars, which would reduce the amount of overtime.

Acting Chief Garcia said that one of her first major tasks when she became Acting Police Chief was to reduce overtime. She said that she has been checking the system and that the new system was put in place under her supervision. There needs to be a fair assessment of where the Department is and there are different things that they are required to cover. However, these are often not part of the budget. They need to sit down and discuss this. They are working on regulating expenses.

Captain Porter said that they need to be efficient and make sure that they are spending the taxpayer dollars efficiently. They need to balance the division properly. There are things that happen and can't be avoided, but there is also top level abuse by others who are creating opportunities for overtime. There needs to be more patrol officers.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Council President Nieves thanked those for attending.

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED TO ADJOURN.  
\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER CRUZ SECONDED.  
\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 9:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Telesco Secretarial Services