

Minutes for Police Budget Advisory Board September 21, 2023

Present: Jeremy Busch, Amaris Elliot-Engel (zoom), James McCorkle, Andrew Spink (Chair); Chief Matthew Colton (ex-officio)

Absent: Geoffrey Geiger, Robert Maclean, Michele Neary; Stephanie Newcomb (ex-officio), Frank Gaglianese (Council Liaison).

6:05, called to order; zoom problems.

I. Approval of minutes and agenda. Not voted on due to Zoom distractions.

II. Questions to ask Chief Colton; we moved straight to a conversation with Chief Colton. The agenda of six questions posed to Chief Colton were formulated at last month's PBAB meeting.

1. Why not one vehicle (to replace the more problematic car)

Four vehicles should be sent to auction. City driving creates excessive wear and tear. 2 cars essentially are driven 24/7—so rotating vehicles would be ideal. Not all need to be auctioned this year, but definitely GV12. Need to stagger auctions, given the city budget process and purchasing process.

Chief Colton provided a break-down of the 16 vehicle fleet (two of which are not in service, and a third is not authorized as an emergency vehicle), including both marked and unmarked vehicles. One vehicle was purchased through Seizure Funds (there is approximately 17K remaining in that fund).

Contractual agreements require that detectives have a take-home car (this helps maintaining the car rather than letting it sit idle). Chief Colton underscored that this contractual agreement did not allow for personal use.

Up-fitting a marked car costs approximately 20K; an unmarked car 5K; it is impossible to interchange marked and unmarked vehicles, even though the unmarked vehicles are in overall better repair.

5-8K is the likely price for an auctioned car. Small taxi companies are the typical buyer.

The preferred vehicle for future purchases is the Chevrolet Malibu.

2. What is the typical mileage for a police car—what is reasonable mileage? 100K is the typical lifespan for a marked vehicle before the maintenance costs become excessive.

The unmarked cars are not driven as much—but if they sit idle other maintenance issues arise.

3. What is the effect of not having the size of the fleet that we have now?

Would fewer cars result in more foot patrols? Readiness?

Chief Colton stated that the foundation is the patrol car. Foot patrol or bicycle patrols are cherry on the cake. Staffing is an issue; walking the beat downtown depends on available staff. Community policing utilizes bike patrols in the downtown, but that is at the discretion of the officers on duty and upon daily staffing. Fewer cars, does not mean more foot/bike patrols but more heavy use of cars.

Typical incidents, such as domestic calls or fights require two officers for safety concerns and the potential of escalating violence.

4. What is the ratio of size of department to size of the vehicle fleet? One officer per car. Each officer has their own car, this encourages better care. Officers who undergo training require a car, as that is more cost effective than reimbursing officers for the use of their privately owned cars.

5. What is utility of changing to a 9mm caliber?

The shift to 9mm is already completed, and covered in the current year's budget.

There are long term savings: 9k to refurbish the previous type, but spending 11K and selling the old guns, nets 2K and ten years of service before costly refurbishing. The 9mm is also the more overall efficient firearm.

6. Need to recognize that the difficulty of recruitment is not a Geneva-centric—but systemic, national. Given the competition and small pool (again emphasizing this is a national problem), how might we operate with fewer officers short term or longer term?

a. The GPD like all PDs, are always asked to do more with less. Current staff is not sustainable. Chief Colton noted that Geneva's population is at 13K + 2K at HWS, and that HWS's campus security is not a police force. He also noted that Geneva is the intersection of routes of 5&20 [Rte. 20 being the longest Route in the US] and the north-south corridor of Rte. 14. So unlike other neighboring communities, Geneva is singular in its position.

The GPD was locally the higher paid force, but now other municipalities are on par or have surpassed the salary and benefits offered by the GPD. For example the Ontario Sheriff's office was least well-compensated of all the local law enforcement groups, but now it has surpassed Geneva and others.

Chief Colton dismissed signing bonuses as they create inequalities in the force, and diminish morale.

Further impediments to recruiting include the structure and schedule of the Civil Service exam (it now takes over a year from the time of applying for the exam to the completion of the academy training); staffing issues restricts how much time there is to recruit from Fort Drum; the NY Professional Policing Act restricts or discourages otherwise eligible candidates.

b. The subject of policing has changed. Internet-based crimes, including pornography, human trafficking, and elder abuse now average at 120 per year for the GPD.

c. Chief Colton would like to encourage more community policing—that is more contact with the public. Asked if there is a municipality that the GPD could emulate, Chief Colton cited Rochester Police Department’s structure as a model—though it was on another scale compared to Geneva.

d. The question of counseling was raised several times; Chief Colton pointed out the GPD’s chaplin program and the EAP (Employee Assistance Program) to address the issue of officer burnout. An interest in volunteer service—counseling, community outreach. Chief Colton felt moving slowly to get it right was the best way forward, including for example, bringing in a counselor to address mental health issues in the city. He reiterated his interest in the PBAB’s question of how to have the city know the police and the police know the city.

Budget Recommendations

Chief Colton noted three items to highlight in the GPD budget discussion:

a. that the *new records management system*—at 25K / year—was expensive and initially complex to install, but will ultimately provide more information and save far more time than the current system (a shift from universal crime reporting [UCR/SRS] to national incident-based reporting system [NIBRS])

b. Firearms cost (the shift to the 9mm) is already covered by this year’s budget.

c. allocating funds for the purchase of 1.5 cars (then auctioning off the two cars would cover the remaining cost of .5 cars).

The PBAB thanked Chief Colton for his generosity of time and thoughtfulness.

Andrew Spink motioned to adjourn. Jeremy Busch seconded. The meeting adjourned at 7:35 PM.

--submitted by James McCorkle