



MINUTES

February 7, 2024

7:00 p.m.

Ralston Room, Albany Fire Department/VIRTUAL

Approved: 04/03/2024

Call to Order

Nicholas Fowler called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

Roll Call

Members present: Adam Brenneman, Erik Rau, Nicholas Fowler, Evan Church, Kevin Kreitman, Erik Anderson

Members absent: Cynthia Greene, Pat Kidd

Staff present: Brad Liles, Police Captain; Shane Wooton, Fire Chief; Kate Hennessy, Administrative Assistant I

Others present: Laura Hawkins, Aoife Rau

December 6, 2023, Minutes were approved as submitted.

Staff Updates

Police Update – Captain Brad Liles

Captain Liles presented both the Annual Crime Report for 2023 and the monthly report on crime for January 2024. He reported that the homicide rate from 2023 was unusually high, but that property crime rates are down. He spoke of national overdose rates, noting that Oregon is leading the nation in overdoses. He cited that last year, the city had 126 overdoses, with 18 overdose deaths (more than the previous four years combined). Fentanyl is the leading cause of overdoses. He stated that the problems will continue until access to addiction treatment and mental health resources improve. Because of Measure 110, law enforcement no longer has the teeth to enforce treatment (as used to happen with drug court). He mentioned that all service industries (fire, law enforcement, and healthcare workers) are seeing an increase in work because of it.

In 2023, Albany Police hired 10 new employees and a CSO. They also have one pending hire right now, as well as two over-hires. They have two retirements coming up (July and August). They are still filling vacancies. Albany still has slightly fewer officers per capita than the rest of the state, despite the fact that Albany is growing. It is also slightly below the national rate of officers per capita.

In referring to the annual report, Captain Liles drew attention to the 63% increase in overdose deaths, as well as mentioning the large increase in “sextortion” cases, which are very difficult to investigate and prosecute. He spoke briefly about those cases, how they happen, and how much time they take to investigate. He pointed out that the statistics on crime overall are skewed by a variety of factors (increases in infrequent crimes, lack of reporting on minor crimes by larger agencies, and lack of reporting by other

agencies). When asked about increases in violent crimes by Fowler, Liles responded that the city is getting more residents from bigger cities who are bringing big city problems with them. Rau asked about the difference between Part One crimes and Group A crimes, and Liles said that Part One crimes are the more serious crimes. Liles mentioned that they have an officer coming out of the academy, and that part of the reason crime statistics are up is that officers are self-referring to calls as they see the need, rather than just waiting for dispatch. The self-initiated calls cause a rise in statistics, but this is due to officers being proactive and doing their jobs.

APD is working on a speed enforcement red light program, pending contract review; there will be three cameras in different school zones.

By March APD is looking to lease office space in the Coastal Farm business offices. It will have bathrooms, a breakroom, computers, and a place where officers can type up their reports. It is also conveniently close to Wal-Mart, where APD fields numerous calls.

Fire Update – Chief Shane Wooton

Referring to his handout, Chief Wooton noted that while July/August started off busy, things slowed down a bit after that. Things then picked up in January 2024, with the ice storm. Life Safety evaluations are ongoing, and the Community Paramedic program is still in force, although the role has evolved to deal with the houselessness situation in Albany as well. Otherwise the types of calls remain the same (referring to the back of the handout).

Highlights for the department: Chief Wooton missed the last meeting because he was in Sweet Home at a public meeting dealing with wildfire community protection. It was well-attended and the attendees were engaged. He had a serendipitous encounter with a gentleman who uses funds from the Office of the State Fire Marshal for fuel abatement. The neighborhood off of 53rd Avenue has roughly 800-900 homes, with only one way in and out. The area is surrounded by green space, a good wildfire fuel source. Wooton proposed working with this gentleman to clear fuel back 100 feet from the fence line, as well as limb some trees. They met all the criteria, called in the City Forester (there is an endangered vine in the area), and got approval. Then they engaged with the HOA, who was very supportive. The HOA asked many good questions, but there is still a little more public education to do beforehand (like handing out flyers).

The single role (EMS) program is up and running, dealing with calls during the peak hours.

Ice storm: the department ran 266 calls from January 13 to January 17, which was 60% higher than the normal rate. There were 65 calls related to fall injuries, lift assists, and trauma associated with falls. Despite messaging to the contrary, many people still went out and tried to get around; a rural board member even fell and was transported. There were only 12 motor vehicle accidents, which was good. There were three calls for cold exposure, none of which were at Marvin's Garden. There were also three burns/scalds (when people using hot water to defrost things fell on the ice and spilled the hot water on themselves). They also had 30 fire alarm activations, most of which were due to burst pipes. Otherwise, everyone was able to show up for work, and there were no wrecks or vehicular incidents, which was good.

Chief Wooton also brought up the annual fire department awards banquet. He said that this was his last banquet before his retirement, and he took the opportunity to award Cynthia Greene the Chief's Award for her unflagging and dedicated services to the department, especially with regard to interviews/hiring.

The department will be going through a lot of transitions in the coming year. Chief Wooton will retire, and Deputy Chief Chris LaBelle has been selected to succeed him. Deputy Chief LaBelle in his turn has selected current Battalion Chief Kevin Vining to succeed him. Wooton is focusing on providing a seamless transition. Two of the other Battalion Chiefs will be retiring, as well as the Training Chief, and the department will be hiring to fill eight vacancies (with lateral interviews scheduled for Friday, February 9). Wooton mentioned taking inspiration from APD to hire laterals, lowering the prerequisites to cast a wide net. Things are very competitive in the fire service right now, and Albany is competing with several other departments who are able to offer more pay/time off. That said, AFD received 24 applications for laterals. They are also hiring entry-level dual-role personnel and have received 97 applications for those positions. There will be many new faces at AFD, and many opportunities for advancement.

Scheduled Business

Elections

Fowler read an email from Cynthia Greene stating that, should she be nominated as Chair, she would be honored to serve in that capacity.

Fowler opened the floor for nominations for Chair. Cynthia Greene was nominated for Chair. Fowler then asked for any further nominations, and hearing none, closed the nominations. Fowler asked for votes for Chair, and those present voted yes in a unanimous vote. Cynthia Greene was reelected as Chair for 2024.

Fowler then opened the floor for nominations for Vice-Chair. Erik Anderson was nominated for Vice-Chair. Fowler then asked for any further nominations, and hearing none, closed the nominations. Fowler then asked for votes for Vice-Chair, and those present voted yes in a unanimous vote. Erik Anderson was elected as Vice-Chair for 2024.

Presentation

Laura Hawkins, Community Engagement Specialist and Public Information Officer for the Albany Police Department presented to the body on her roles and APD's social media program. Hawkins organizes programs like citizen and youth academies, Safety Camp, and Coffee with a Cop, as well as handling the social media program for the department. She mentioned that when an incident occurs in town, the department has between 30 seconds and 3 minutes before people start posting online about it. There are no controls for misinformation, so it's important for the department to stay on top of the narrative and present the facts. She also said that it's useful to be in contact with the public in cases of things like missing children (she cited a case from last year where, within minutes, there were over 4,000 views of a post for a lost child), where the public can be engaged to help the police department.

She also spoke of how the program started and how the department's TikTok presence grew to over a million followers (before it was shut down by TikTok; a new account currently has over 20,000 followers). Officers report that around the country, the department's site is well-known, and Albany Police's videos have even been used by the FBI for some of their training. The strategy of the program is twofold: one, to humanize law enforcement to the public and encourage connections; and two, to get news out to the public and keep them informed of local happenings in a timely manner. It has also helped with promoting the department's programs; the youth academies are always full and generally have a wait list, and they routinely have over 40 neighborhoods participating in National Night Out (a contact from much-larger Mesa, AZ, says they can't usually get more than 20 neighborhoods to participate). Rau asked about the possibility of multilingual presentations over social media, and the possibility of real-time call information. Hawkins answered that the current platforms (especially TikTok) provide for some multilingual

functionality. As to the advisability of featuring real-time calls, Liles cited security concerns as a reason against currently doing this.

Measure 110 Discussion

Fowler reported the Oregon Legislature is currently in session and looking to amend Measure 110. A current proposal is to reinstate a Class C misdemeanor for possession of fentanyl and heroin, which would be dismissed if the person goes to a diversion program. Fowler urged private citizens to call their representatives and make their views heard on this issue, and maybe suggest it be made a Class A rather than Class C misdemeanor (currently Class C misdemeanors are only tried in municipal courts, which lack the enforcement abilities of higher-level courts). He mentioned that he, as a private citizen, has a meeting with Senator Sarah Gelser later this week to discuss this issue. Liles mentioned that Captain Jerry Drum is in Washington, D.C. this week testifying before Congress on the issues and problems surrounding the current fentanyl crisis. He also told the group that Senator Jeff Merkley will be at a town hall meeting at LBCC Tuesday, February 13, from 10:00 to 11:30, and that would be a good place/time to bring up the fentanyl issue. Anderson asked if the department has dealt much with xylazine. Liles answered no; most of the fentanyl that comes up here is already pre-formed into pills, although they are seeing more powdered fentanyl lately (which can be cut with any number of dangerous substances).

Next Meeting Date

The next regularly scheduled meeting is on Wednesday, April 3, 2024, at the Albany Police Department.

Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Nicholas Fowler adjourned the meeting at 8:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Reviewed by,

Kate Hennessy
Administrative Assistant I

Reviewer's Name
Reviewer's Title

**Documents discussed at the meeting that are not in the agenda packet are archived in the record. The documents are available by emailing cityclerk@cityofalbany.net.*