

**Chief's Advisory Committee
December 10, 2024, at 2:30 p.m.
Administrative Conference Room**

Meeting Participants: Chief Buttice, Captain Kevin Bayne, Captain Eric Knudson, Earl Gooding Jr., Mark Higgins, Noah Leavitt, Terry McConn, Dick Morgan, Steve Moss

Absent: Ruben Hernandez

Chief's Welcome

Pioneer Park Discovery Update

The Walla Walla Police Department, in collaboration with the Washington State Patrol Crime Lab, worked yesterday and today processing the scene where human remains were discovered near Pioneer Park. Additional remains were located at the site during the investigation. The Walla Walla County Coroner's Office will arrange for the remains to be analyzed by the Washington State Forensic Anthropologist. This analysis will include processing and a thorough examination to provide more information. During the committee meeting Terry McConn provided the name of an individual that may be helpful for historical reference.

Press releases will be issued as information comes available. The sidewalk project remains on hold.

Citizen Concerns Regarding Immigration Laws

Several people have spoken recently with Chief Buttice regarding the recent presidential election results and immigration laws. RCW 10.93.160 and state law do not allow us to enforce immigration law. The Walla Walla Police Department does not enforce federal immigration laws, and we do not ask for citizenship paperwork. Nothing has changed in our approach. We will help anyone that is in need of police services.

Dick Morgan asked how dispatch will handle calls regarding undocumented citizens. Chief Buttice responded if there was no crime, then the call would most likely be filtered out at the dispatch center. The Police Department will only get involved if a crime takes place. We will take care of people equally and treat everyone with respect.

CJTC Training Regarding Hate Crimes

Noah Leavitt recently sent Chief Buttice an article where a woman in another location did not feel her report was investigated properly. She felt the police were tired of hearing from her. Chief Buttice responded the Criminal Justice Training Commission's (CJTC) academy gives basic training on responding to hate crimes. We are taught to respond to all crimes. Noah Leavitt inquired if it would be worthwhile getting additional training regarding hate crimes. Chief Buttice responded we will always update the training as the laws change. Each staff member on average receives over 154 hours of annual training. Our officers get significantly more training than the 24 hours required annually by the state for Peace Officers. As a result of the extensive training, our claims are incredibly low for

liability. Last year Dr. Marks provided implicit bias training to law enforcement across the valley. While we recognize the regional and national issues, Chief Buttice tries to focus on our local issues. Captain Knudson noted we have a crime victim advocate available to assist to help victims; this is a local resource. As training becomes available and the value becomes apparent, we will incorporate it.

Investigative Case Loads (Prioritization)

Captain Knudson explained the struggle we are experiencing on caseload volume. One of the things we recognized coming out of COVID was the increasing number of sexual assaults and child molestation. The Major Crimes group has three investigators that specialize in investigating sexual assaults, and they have thirty cases each. In the past each detective would carry about twenty cases. Additionally, Detective Chris Ruchert primarily handles forensic extractions that need to be completed as part of the case investigation. It takes a significant amount of time to train someone as a detective, so when a detective retired, we were fortunate to recruit Detective Kristen Daschofsky from the Walla Walla County Sheriff's Office. She started in Patrol, and soon after transitioned to Major Crimes with little training needed.

Patrol literally goes from call to call with stacked calls waiting in the queue. Many calls for service require two officers to respond. And the call volume keeps increasing. A few years ago, we researched Call Differential Response to see if there were any types of emergency calls that officers do not need to respond to. It showed that few calls can be handled solely by other agencies without law enforcement present. Mental health responders are not equipped to handle violent individuals. So, until the safety of the situation is known, law enforcement also needs to respond to mental health calls until this can be determined.

Violent crimes and personal crimes are more likely to be investigated than a "cold" burglary that is not in progress. On a positive note, we have had fewer property crimes. Major Crimes and the Walla Walla Regional Drug and Gang Task Force (Task Force) will both drop everything to work on a major event like a local shooting investigation.

Courts/Bail/Accountability

The Task Force, in coordination with multiple local and state law enforcement agencies, successfully disrupted an alleged drug trafficking operation following a collaborative investigation initiated by information received from Washington State Penitentiary Intelligence and Investigations Unit (WSP IIU). On December 3 the Task Force was alerted by WSP IIU to an impending introduction of controlled substances into the prison facility. A Walla Walla man, Scorpio Rodriguez and his associates, from the prison and the Walla Walla County Jail were plotting the introduction. Detectives secured a search warrant targeting three individuals, two vehicles, and two locations. As a result, 2.5 pounds of suspected methamphetamine was seized during the search. The state requested based upon the severity of the crime that bail be set at \$250,000. Instead, the judge set the bail at \$500. Rodriguez paid the bail and was released back into the community. Chief Buttice encouraged people to talk with your legislators and senators about reform.

Captain Knudson noted by statute the presence of fentanyl in a home allows officers to remove children due to its danger to the children. We want a user to get healthy. The court system needs to acknowledge the difference between a user and a dealer. Two and 1/2 pounds of methamphetamine is a dealer level. Judges have a large discretion in their ruling.

The crimes that take place at the Washington State Penitentiary are counted in our crime statistics. Additionally, the Walla Walla Police Department investigates crimes that take place at the Washington State Penitentiary. We track the number of hours we spend investigating and charge them for the hours. Unfortunately, the amount billed does not cover our full salary cost.

Mark Higgins recommended removing the benches from the downtown area to discourage homeless people from loitering in the area. We need visitors to the area to feel safe since tourism is the main industry in downtown Walla Walla. Chief Buttice responded that if the sleep center is full at night, people locally can sleep in the public areas.

Steve Moss is aware of the individual who is chalking his opinions on the sidewalks daily throughout the downtown. The City Council is receiving numerous complaints every week about this chalking. City Attorney Tim Donaldson is researching alternative approaches. He has already researched pertinent court cases and recommended city employees do not remove the chalk messages for 24 hours. However, community members can clean off chalk marks at any time.

Terry McConn has observed the newer judges tend to be more lenient. As the judge sees repeat offenders, they get tougher on the judgments. Chief Buttice responded there is a lack of accountability in our local justice system to repeat and/or severe offenders. The risk to the community needs to be considered. Regardless of how the court handles the case, the Task Force remains committed to disrupting drug trafficking and associated criminal activity in our community.

Wrap Up

We continue to do great things. He is very proud of the patience and professionalism of the department staff demonstrates.

Chief Buttice has begun drafting the department's 2025 goals.

He truly appreciates the open dialog and feedback provided by the Chief's Advisory Committee. There are no term limits to being on the committee. If you have a desire to move on, please let Chief Buttice know.

Next Meeting

The next Chief's Advisory Meeting – date to be determined—Chief's Conference Room.

The December 10, 2024, meeting adjourned at 3:50 p.m.

Submitted by Deborah Minter