

Chief's Advisory Committee
April 15, 2025, at 2:30 p.m.
Administrative Conference Room

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

Absent: Captain Kevin Bayne

Chief's Welcome

Update on Staffing, Budget, and Training

Last month two of our veteran officers left and took work with another law enforcement agency. This created two vacancies. Chief Buttice noted the larger agencies have more career opportunities and higher pay. Anton Bushkovskiy, an officer with the College Place Police Department, has accepted an offer to work for us. He starts on April 21. There is still one vacancy to fill. Four candidates were interviewed yesterday to establish a new entry level officer list. The Civil Service will meet next month to certify the entry level officer list. It takes about a year to get a new officer through the training process. There are two additional lateral officer applications. Chief Buttice will not hire to fill a vacancy, he will review the options and hire the right person to fill the spot even if this creates a delay. Public Safety Testing changed their officer screening process, so we started over with the entry-level officer list. No individuals that were on the previous entry-level officer list tested again. There appears to be less interest in applying, so we are working on a recruitment video.

This is the leanest budget that Chief Buttice has worked with. Even when we fill this second officer opening, there will remain an existing unfunded officer position that will *not* be filled until City revenue increases. Vacancies create more workload for the other officers to cover. Captain Knudson and Captain Bayne have given directives that will keep our overtime down. Our department's Strategic Plan has four main goals

- 1) Succession planning for WWPDP and WESCOM,
- 2) Successful recruitment and retention,
- 3) Building community relationships and partnerships, and
- 4) Drug overdose reduction strategy.

May 1st will be the third-year anniversary of Chief Buttice being promoted to Chief. We will continue to work on succession planning in order to prepare command staff for when retirements occur from the Chief down. We do not currently have funding to put an additional captain in place to train a replacement, but this will be a focus as we move forward to secure funding to include an additional Captain position.

Our budget only allows training that is required for certification. Additionally, we did not budget to pay for the five months of academy expenses as the state was going to pay for the officer training. The state is now also operating on a tight budget and shifted 25% of the academy cost to the local agency. So, we will have to find funding to cover any academy expenses. On a lean budget this is not what you want to have happen. Despite

the lean budget, we are currently on budget. We are doing the best we can with no funding to cultivate training for promotional opportunities. There are many new sergeants that would make great captains, but it's a long road to get that institutional information.

State Legislative Actions Impacting Law Enforcement

There were two potential state legislative actions that could have a negative impact on law enforcement. Neither passed. Chief Buttice does not see anything else coming down the pike that would impact us.

Graffiti Concerns and Connections

While graffiti was addressed during the Town Hall, Noah Leavitt asked for an update on graffiti concerns. Chief Buttice answered there has been a recent increase in graffiti. There could be a lot of reasons for this. It could be tensions among gangs are heating up or there are new members trying to gain status in the gangs. When graffiti is reported, we take a report. Crime Watch has volunteers that are diligent about covering up graffiti. We are trying to match the color so it's less obvious the area was painted. Noah Leavitt responded that a citizen recently posed the idea of having community endorsed mural projects to address graffiti. A permanent sealer is painted on top of the mural, so it cannot be damaged again. Steve Moss was interested in possibly utilizing a mural project. Dick Morgan cautioned the sealer is very expensive, so factor that into the cost.

Any Federal Funding for WWPDP at Risk?

Captain Knudson was disappointed that the State cut the \$2.7 million which was designated for operating task forces that operate throughout the state. The state budget cycle ends on June 30. Our local task force is currently unfunded as of July 1 of this year. He was cautiously optimistic that the task force funding would be added back to the State budget. The Walla Walla Regional Drug/Gang Task Force is comprised of College Place Police Department, Washington State Department of Corrections, Walla Walla County Sheriff's Office, and our agency (Walla Walla Police Department). Each agency said they would pay the staff expenses; however, it takes an additional \$150,000 the state was paying to purchase supplies, software, controlled drug buys, training, etc. Doing a controlled buy and paying commission for information is expensive. Before creating the task force, the WWPDP's efforts to arrest drug suppliers would find lower-level dealers with small quantities of drugs. We are focused on mid-to-upper-level dealers. Our task force is taking pounds of drugs off the street. The task force is making a tremendous impact on community safety.

The state budget cut on task forces is creating a huge ripple across the entire state. We will have to restructure if the state funding is cut. Hopefully, each partner is interested in continuing with the local task force. However, their participation will be based on whether they get more synergy from the multi-agency participation and effectiveness in their local area.

If each agency wants to roll forward as a task force and continues to pay their personnel expenses, we still will need to find funding for the necessities to operate. He has the task force what items they absolutely must have funded. Whenever our task force arrested high-ranking drug suppliers it crippled the local drug availability for a month afterward. Unfortunately, it is obvious when there a new dealer because our overdoses go up.

Some of our staff are deputized so they can provide support in neighboring counties and in Oregon. It can take several months to complete a deeper investigation and requires increased resources to successfully investigate and prosecute large scale cases. Recently the Blue Mountain Narcotics Task Force assisted us with an investigation.

Our equipment is limited by our budget and surveillance equipment is expensive. We do not have a helicopter or higher-tech equipment for long-range surveillance. We are doing the best we can with the resources we have.

The task force members just got back from Washington State Narcotics Investigators Association (WSNIA) Training Summit last week. The drug dealers are creative and smart, so they are constantly learning new tricks like using cash apps rather than cash. People are trying to bring illegal drugs into the prison and we are responsible for investigating these cases adding to our current workload. Steve Moss had ideas on how to fund the task force and will discuss it offline.

The Walla Walla Police Department's funding comes from general funds (property tax and sales tax). Currently we do not have any federal grants, but we would be affected by state funding cuts. In addition to partially funding our task force, our Crime Victim Advocate position is primarily funded by a state grant. This two-year grant expires on June 30. We are applying again for a grant to renew this position. Emmy Thompson took on this role a year ago and she is making an amazing number of contacts. In the event that Chalese Braman, our Domestic Violence Services Officer would retire in the recent future, Emmy Thompson would be a possible fit for succession planning into that role.

Terry McConn heard the Governor expressed interest in the state funding additional law enforcement positions. Chief Buttice responded that funding helps during the grant years, but when the grant ends the department must pay for the position to roll forward or lay the person filling that position off. Without sustained funding, it's not helpful to bring staff on and then have to let them go when grant funding runs out.

The school district is interested in exploring re-implementing of a school resource officer (SRO). Ongoing sustained funding is a huge concern. We do not want to add people and then cut the position due to poor planning. We need to resolve how to fund the SRO position during the summer school break before moving forward with filling it. While we do have some room for attrition with staff retiring, there is not always a spot available to fill if funding for a new position dries up.

Community Outreach Regarding Local/Federal Immigration Enforcement

Chief Buttice noted our police department will not enforce immigration laws. We cannot stop immigration agencies from arresting people locally, but we will not be assisting them. Many Advisory Committee members have heard people express concern and fear about local immigrant enforcement. Chief Buttice, Captain Knudson, and Captain Bayne are available to talk with people to answer any questions.

While our budget for block parties was cut down to two events, we can organize picnics outside of those organized block parties. We will continue to make ourselves available to

answer questions to anyone who has concerns. Captain Knudson thinks there is trust with law enforcement, however, he is concerned that people are under reporting when crime takes place for fear of being deported.

Recently a police car was damaged and parked in the City Corporation yard. Part of the Walla Walla Police Department logo was damaged; POLICE was cut short to ICE. This mangled logo led to concern on some people that the WWPD was participating with ICE. We are not. Chief Buttice has sent out several directives that while we will not stop immigration officers from doing their jobs, we will not assist them. Terry McConn heard that federal agencies were seeing an agency not assisting with immigration enforcement as obstructing. Chief Buttice responded we will continue to follow the state RCW.

Wrap Up

Earl Gooding Jr. asked if there have been any changes in chalking on public sidewalks since the passing of the local municipal code. The location of the chalking has changed. We are putting cases together for City Attorney Tim Donaldson to cite the individuals responsible for chalking and not cleaning up before the allotted timeframe. Each violation has a \$500 per fine. We will do what we can legally through the city's municipal code.

The county commissioners approved placing a 2/10th of 1% sales tax on the August primary ballot. If approved by a simple majority, it would provide ongoing sustainable funding for dispatch. Passing this dedicated sales tax would reduce user fees paid by fire and law enforcement agencies to keep WESCOM operating. Our county has a significant number of visitors coming to our area and they utilize 9-1-1 while here. A dedicated sales tax would create a way for locals *and* visitors to help pay for dispatch services. Plus, it would create a sustainable funding source for WESCOM.

As for finding a more suitable location for WESCOM and the Emergency Management Department (EMD), the Port of Walla Walla building did not work out. Now we are looking at doing a combined package of WESCOM and EMD being placed in a second story of the proposed project to build a new College Place Police Department building.

This week is National Telecommunicators Week.

Amber Chinnery was recognized as the *local* 2024 WAN Telecommunicator of the Year for sustained superior service. In addition, she was also selected as the *state* Telecommunicator of the Year.

Dispatch Supervisor Tammy Smith was selected for the 2024 *state* award as WAN Supervisor of the Year. Tammy started as a dispatcher about thirty years ago.

Next Meeting

The next Chief's Advisory Meeting will be held on June 24 at 2:30 p.m. in the Chief's Conference Room.

The April 15 meeting adjourned at 3:43 p.m. Submitted by Deborah Minter