

Chairman Cade called the meeting to order at 4:05 PM.

Members present: Vilicia Cade (Chairperson), Valerie Cruse (Vice Chairperson), Anthony Harris, Taylor Sutphen, Daryl Murphy

Ex-Officio members and staff present: Blake Harris (City Commissioner), Naomi Twine (City Commissioner) Eric Wobser (City Manager), John Orzech (Assistant City Manager), Jared Oliver (Police Chief), Jim Green (Acting Fire Chief), Brendan Heil (Law Director), McKenzie Spriggs (Commission Clerk)

Members absent: Daniel Williams

CURRENT BUSINESS

Approval of Minutes

Upon motion of Anthony Harris and second of Taylor Sutphen, the members voted to approve the minutes of the September 9, 2020, meeting and suspend the formal reading. The Chairwoman declared the motion passed.

Introduction of Acting Fire Chief, Jim Green

Acting Fire Chief, Jim Green has been with the city of Sandusky for over 30 years. He is serving as the interim chief and has a long history within the community. The biggest concerns right now are COVID-19 and making sure the department gets staffed back up. The shortage comes from retirements that have not been replaced. The department is in the process of rehiring right now.

Vilicia Cade asked if the department is also responsible for EMS. Jim Green said yes.

Taylor Sutphen asked how many firefighters they are down. Jim Green said they are three short, and are running with 14 on a shift. Ideally, he would like to get back to 15.

Taylor Sutphen asked if the west end is still closing regularly. Jim Green said no, it is not. Central station also assists with the west end on calls. Taylor Sutphen said he had a situation hit close to home with his grandmother recently on the west side of town. Jim Green said there is a rumor of the stations closing or being closed, which is not true.

Valerie Cruse commended the fire department, she also had a personal experience with her husband and they were there within three minutes.

Anthony Harris asked about the presence of the fire department in the community. Jim Green said they do fire prevention week, they attend festivals with the safety house, but would like to do more next year, when COVID is over.

Anthony Harris said this committee and community needs a closer relationship with both police and fire. He would like to see a more visible presence, within the senior and black community. Jim Green said that comment is noted.

Vilicia Cade asked about the fire department demographics. Jim Green said there are currently no women, two minorities, and one minority currently being interviewed.

Vilicia Cade and Anthony Harris asked for clarification on total numbers of the department. Jim Green said they have 42 total.

Taylor Sutphen asked about outreach in the schools, for example a junior fire program. When he went to Sandusky City Schools there was little fire presence and recruitment.

Jim Green said they have an explorer's program to get exposed to the department. They do normal duties as firefighters. With COVID, it has been tapered back. He acknowledged they need to get out there, and promote the message of how rewarding of a career it is. Tony Bonner previously did this work, and it needs to be reinvigorated.

Vilicia Cade agreed and noted two women and minorities out of 42 is alarming. She noted a targeted recruitment plan would be encouraged and she would be willing to talk with Jim Green and help. For examples, targeting historically black colleges. She would like to help bring the esteem back to the profession, that these are honorable careers, and help attract diversity represented in our community.

Jim Green said he would welcome that help. They have testing coming this spring, and better advertising for this testing and recruitment, with messaging about the benefits of this career will be important to getting a good candidate pool. He would be happy to discuss with anyone on this committee and they are welcome to contact him anytime.

Anthony Harris asked if McKenzie Spriggs could share his email with the committee so they can have continued dialogue about recruitment efforts. McKenzie Spriggs said absolutely.

Valerie Green asked if lock boxes existed. Jim Green said yes, please contact Fire Marshal, Steve Rucker at the department.

Introduction of Police Chief, Jared Oliver

Jared Oliver is a lifelong resident, currently living on the west end. He has raised his family in the city, two boys and now a daughter. He worked through the ranks at the Erie County Sheriff's Department, everything from working investigations to overseeing dispatch and patrol divisions. He was celebrating one month at the time of this meeting. His ultimate goal is to make sure the residents and visitors of this community are safe. In the short term, he is working through COVID-19 and hopes to rehire staff, and fill positions of retired and seasoned officers. Two interviews

were conducted last week. A civil service meeting is in the works, so they can assemble a new list of candidates. He is learning every day. He noted Anthony Harris' comment to Jim Green and wants to be visible and present in the community. Saturday, December 12, the police department is working a toy drive with OHgo, and he hopes to get out in the community as much as possible, next year.

Anthony Harris said the demographics of the police department began to expand under former Chief, John Orzech. He has not had significant issues with the police department, but asked how Jared Oliver plans to maintain and improve current community relations between the public and the officers. He noted the community needs to feel comfortable and know the police officers are sensitive to the heart beat of the community.

Jared Oliver said John Orzech laid a great foundation and he comes from the foundation you have to be transparent and honest with people, in law enforcement and in humans generally. The only way people will trust you is if they can trust you, and if you have proven yourself trustworthy. Communication is important, phone calls are important, dialogue is important. National issues have trickled down to the local level, it has affected recruitment. What we can control locally, what we can control and that starts with dialogue and honesty.

Anthony Harris said he concerned about what happens nationally, but he is more concerned about what happens local. The more we can trust and rely on law enforcement, the better. The truth may hurt but it is necessary. He feels better knowing both police and fire chiefs will present the truth and work towards resolution of issues. Resolution rather than creating or exacerbating issues is the goal.

Jared Oliver said he will work towards that every day, if given the opportunity to prove himself. He gave an anecdotal story about the weekend and its chaos, where the victim's family said they appreciated and trusted the detective staff and department after their treatment of her over the last several days, this was a departure from previous feelings toward police officers.

Vilicia Cade wanted to take it one step further. Safety of everyone, officers, citizens, visitors is important. She wants to be sure we are taking a proactive stance with officers. This includes proactive training on all diversity issues and ensuring issues do not escalate. She gave a personal story of her son and said we are not immune from national issues. She said is especially interested in this group and herself helping the department take a proactive stance in training (gender issues, mental health issues, diversity and race relations, all of it), and potentially recruitment. She said it's commendable that the department saw a change in a resident, from their treatment and interaction with the department. She asked if our officers wear body cameras and asked what the department is currently doing to ensure transparency and training? She said Chief John Orzech has done a wonderful job and she has heard great reviews on Jared Oliver. She hopes to work on some of these issues and be proactive together when Jared Oliver has had time to transition and the community has had resolution over the pandemic.

Jared Oliver said body cameras are currently worn and are on all the time. He is on the county board for CIT, crisis intervention training, and deescalating is imperative rather than adding fuel to the fire. He said he has an open door policy.

Anthony Harris said it wouldn't hurt if officers smiled as well. The committee laughed.

Jared Oliver said point taken and the smiles and waves mean a lot to the officers.

Daryl Murphy said he has talked with our new police chief, Jared Oliver, after the incident over the weekend, and Jared Oliver does indeed have an open door policy. John Orzech has done a great job and he sees that continuing with Jared Oliver. He noted things have been pretty good over the last several years. He asked Jared Oliver to convey the message that people are innocent until proven guilty, and he has heard from the black community that officers feel they are guilty of something when being pulled over. He thinks a refresh in training might help with how officers approach cars. He hopes the NAACP continues to have a great relationship with the Sandusky Police Department.

Update on Community Concerns

Vilicia Cade gave an update on some community concerns she had heard, and later talked with City Manager, Eric Wobser, about.

The first was in regards to factory speakers. The former Police Chief, John Orzech explained the ordinance discussing noise, if noise is excessive from over 50 feet, it violates the law. Most troubling is the hours in which many of the sound amplification issues are taking place, which are more concerning after 10pm.

Next, Vilicia Cade moved onto speeding cars at the "Tims" on east Oldgate/ Forest Drive. The city staff said speed monitors could be installed which helps deter speeding.

Lastly, the concern of demolitions instead of rebuilding and reinvesting in MacArthur Park was addressed. The city staff explained many of these properties were built as workforce housing-- unsafe with failing foundations and not built for long term use. Based on this, the City has made a dedicated effort to acquire properties in this area for the sake of interim demolition. The long term play is to have investors come in and remake the area, park and housing so it is a cohesive effort to reinvent the neighborhood. Eric Wobser and New Jerusalem are working together to communicate efforts to the community and to make sure their voices are reflected in the future plans. The CRC is going to be involved in these efforts and discussions.

Review Mission and Goals for CRC

Vilicia Cade asked if the members thought about why this group existed and what they would like to do with this unique position.

Taylor Sutphen had talked about a desire to aid in diversity and recruitment efforts.

Daryl Murphy said the commission does not have teeth to it, and that is the perspective of those in the community. He has been communicating back to the community that this is a bridge between the city and the black community. If they have issues or questions, this commission can help get those resolved. It needs to be louder that this is an active board.

Anthony Harris said the commission needs communicate that they are present and accessible to the community. He spoke of investigations and being an impartial committee.

Vilicia Cade said she is hearing of the need for increased visibility and understanding, helping with recruitment within city departments, and helping the community understand the role of the CRC as a bridge/liaison.

City Boards and Commissions

McKenzie Spriggs said the city is making a push to increase the diversity of the boards and commissions. She extended the application to this committee, prior to this meeting, in the hopes that they could help get the word out. Additionally, there are six members serving on this committee, while there are seven spots, meaning there is one open spot.

Future Project

Vilicia Cade asked what is a project the CRC and City Manager could work on during this time of racial strife in our nation?

Taylor Sutphen wondered if there was a way to do a joint hiring fair—this committee is comprised of members from the schools, NAACP, Erie County, etc. A hiring/recruitment event is a way to show the community these well-paying jobs and careers exist in our own city. The city can only hire those who apply, and the city cannot hire a diverse work force if those candidates do not apply. We are the community and the role of this commission could be to help get the word out and increase the strength of recruitment. A community event mixing those hiring and the community members, would be a good exercise.

Anthony Harris agreed and said an information fair would be great. Vilicia Cade agreed and said a simple career fair is what schools call it.

Blake Harris said he has shared these openings on social media and the feedback lacked. In his own observation, when things happen within the community or around the world, people are hot on making changes. When things cool off, the desire and willingness to serve on these boards fades. As a result, he sees there are these slightly unfair narratives that the city does not want to diversify. Whether its women, youth, or the black community being better incorporated. He acknowledges his platform is not major, but when sharing the boards and commissions info, he

did not see the type of feedback and willingness to serve that he had hoped for. He suggested reinventing the wheel and finding other ways to stress the importance of these boards and careers is important to our community.

Jared Oliver said the fire department offers great jobs, but a career as a police officer is very rewarding too. He encourages folks to look at these career fields.

McKenzie Spriggs added that the city commission is working to adjust the times of these meetings so that people with families, working people, etc. can make the meeting times. The option to move these meetings to later in the evening is open.

NEW BUSINESS

Schedule for 2021

The committee said they would like to try 6PM meeting times and set the following schedule:

- March 10
- June 9
- September 8
- December 8

Daryl Murphy brought up a code compliance issue, John Orzech said he now oversees code compliance and would be happy to help. They will address that issue offline.

Naomi Twine voiced communicating the commission's mission to the community has always been an issue. With the meetings being virtual, that is an opportunity for residents to view what is happening. She appreciated the introductions made this evening between the new chiefs and this body. She said recruitment efforts have been discussed at these meetings before and progress has been made, but encouraged everyone to continue those important efforts.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion of Daryl Murphy and a second of Valerie Cruse, the members voted to adjourn at 5:09PM. The Chairperson declared the motion passed.



Attest: McKenzie Spriggs, Clerk
Date: 4 / 29 / 21



Vilicia Cade, Chairperson
Date: 4 / 29 / 21