



## **PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE (Virtual Meeting)**

*Chaired by Council Member Victor Jones*

*Committee Members: Jones, Moore, Williams and Johnson*

**MARCH 17, 2021 – 4:00 p.m.**

**COUNCIL CHAMBERS – MUNICIPAL BUILDING**

### **MINUTES**

*As part of the city of High Point's on-going COVID-19 mitigation efforts, in-person attendance was not allowed at this meeting. Instead, the meeting was live-streamed and the public was provided an opportunity to listen to the meeting as it was being live-streamed.*

[www.HighPointNC.gov/VirtualPublicMeeting](http://www.HighPointNC.gov/VirtualPublicMeeting)

### **CALL TO ORDER and ROLL CALL**

Chairman Jones called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m.

Following a virtual roll call by Chairman Jones, the following attendance by committee Members was duly noted.

Chairman Victor Jones (remote participation)  
Committee Member Tyrone Johnson (remote participation)  
Committee Member Chris Williams (physically present)

Committee Member Britt Moore was **absent**.

### **Staff Present:**

Randy McCaslin, Interim City Manager; Greg Ferguson, Assistant City Manager; Eric Olmedo, Assistant City Manager; Jeron Hollis, Managing Director; JoAnne Carlyle, City Attorney; Ryan Ferguson, Marketing Manager; Travis Stroud, Interim Police Chief; and Lisa Vierling, City Clerk

### **Others present:**

Catherine Johnson, Director of the Family Justice Center

PRESENTATION OF ITEMS**2021-108      Family Justice Center Update**

Interim Police Chief Travis Stroud of the High Point Police Department and Catherine Johnson, Director of the Family Justice Center will provide an update on the Family Justice Center.

*Chief Stroud introduced Catherine Johnson, Director of the Family Justice Center (FJC).*

*Ms. Johnson advised there are several agencies that work out of the FJC and noted that the success of the center is driven by the agencies that work there. The first location in Greensboro opened in 2015 with the High Point location opening in October 2018. Between both centers, they have over 100 professionals representing 17 different programs and services and the centers provide a "one stop shop" for the public to access services for child abuse, domestic violence, sexual violence, and elder abuse. Guilford County's role is to create the access, then all the partners throughout the community come together in one place to offer the services. In 2013-2014, Guilford County led the State in the most numbers of domestic violence homicides.*

*In High Point, there are partner agencies that have full-time staff in house that includes: High Point Police Department Special Victims Unit (they investigate all adult and child crime-related domestic and sexual violence); Family Service of the Piedmont (adult and children services); Legal Services; Social Services; Guilford County Sheriff's Office; and Mental Health Services.*

*Ms. Johnson shared that between Greensboro and High Point, those victims needing the services access over \$5 million worth of resources in one place; Council Member Williams, the City of High Point and the High Point Police Department were really helpful in getting the FJC in High Point open; the High Point FJC has been deemed one of the most beautiful family justice centers in the Nation and is certainly something to be proud of.*

*Ms. Johnson spoke to how all of the resources they offer at the center do a lot of different things from advocacy and counseling to safety planning; how clients can follow up with a law enforcement officer if there is a pending case; they offer free legal services; they offer electronic filing for restraining orders; how the FJC is successful because they open up and continue meeting the needs of the public; one of the biggest needs in the High Point center is access to mental health services; and mental health counseling services is one of the most requested services in the High Point FJC.*

*She then shared pictures of the beautiful interior of the FJC and spoke to how it has the "look good, feel good, and smell good" because it cannot feel like a police department; it cannot smell like a hospital; cannot feel and look like a place that is 50 years old; and stressed the importance of survivors coming to a place where they feel like they are a priority.*

*Ms. Johnson stressed that their #1 goal is to save lives and they see themselves as a homicide prevention initiative which is really important and that 99% of their clients coming into the FCJ have had a positive life outcome. She noted they saw a dramatic reduction countywide in domestic violence homicides except for 2020 due to COVID impacts.*

*She spoke to increasing offender accountability; they have a way to track this in house and with their partnership with the High Point Police Department, they can put pressure on the*

people committing these crimes. From the time they opened the Greensboro center in 2015, they have had an increase in the percentage of clients coming in for services; the total served in 2015-2016 was 4,852 and 2019-2020 was 11,183. The statistics show that the demand for services in High Point, from when the FJC opened in October 2018 until the last quarter ending December 2020, COVID hit in Quarter 2 and Quarter 3 of 2020 and they saw some challenges; they saw a real reduction in services, but they have had a significant steady increase per quarter of people coming in; about 60% of the people coming in to the FJC in High Point return because they are getting more and more services. Throughout COVID, Ms. Johnson reported that the FJC has been fully operational and when everything shut down in March 2020, they kept the FJC doors open every day which is a testament to the helpers on the frontline making those tough choices to care for the community, to care for themselves, and to care for their own families. During this time, some of the agencies such as Mental Health Services and Legal Services went remote. In High Point alone, the FJC helped over 9,000 people during COVID with 3,600 people coming into the FJC. Ms. Johnson shared that the people coming in to seek services are coming in with much more intensive problems.

Ms. Johnson stated there was no doubt that domestic violence was up in 2020 because domestic violence breeds in isolation and COVID brought on isolation. She shared that coming out of COVID, she feels confident that they will see dramatic increases in elder abuse, child abuse, and domestic/sexual violence, so they want to continue to create the invitation and let people know that the FJC is open and offering services.

She went on to share that 2020 was record setting countywide with 15 domestic violence homicides, the highest number on record; three of these domestic violence homicides occurred in High Point. She spoke to how this is a national trend because homicide rates across the nation are up as well as rates of murder/suicide; how the cards seem to be stacked higher against people needing help because they feel their resources/options are strained; how the decrease in services has been consequence to the community; there has been a decrease in accountability so suspects are getting arrested and being released with limited to no bond or a written promise or reductions to keep jail population low; how this creates a safety risk for people staying home; that with courts being closed and the major delays it is like kicking a big problem again and again.

Ms. Johnson advised that it is their partnerships that make the difference and shared some photos of various partnerships. She talked about keeping things going, even during COVID, with the Camp HOPE program, an overnight camping trip for kids living in homes with domestic violence and spoke to how important it is for families living in crisis needing a lifeline now more than ever.

In closing, Ms. Johnson shared some innovative resources and response strategies focusing on internet crimes against children which are up 100% from this year to last year; safety planning, frauds and scams around older adults; physical abuse of older adults. They have done some live chats and creative outreach. A new program being piloted in the county is Caitlyn's Courage, specialized monitoring of domestic violence offenders when on pretrial release.

Interim Police Chief Travis Stroud followed at the conclusion of Ms. Johnson's presentation. He highlighted the law enforcement side of the Police Department's role at the FJC, particularly around domestic violence. He explained that everything the Police Department does is data driven and stressed the importance of this because it drives and directs their

*focus. He proceeded to give a brief review of the Police Department's crime statistics report that is compiled by the department's crime statisticians and released every Tuesday.*

*He spoke to the report showing a COVID trend; they have been tracking numbers since Day 1 to see if the numbers were going up, going down, or steady; he shared results of domestic violence calls for a six-month window for the period of October 2020 through March 14, 2021 (domestic violence calls overall and domestic violence calls involving intimate partners) as compared to the total calls for service coming in through 911 or the non-emergency line; COVID; reported that COVID did not change that much for them in regards to the actual calls for service, particularly domestic violence; although the numbers are lower in some periods, there are still victims out there; every line, every number on the chart mean's there are still victims out there who need some type of assistance; this is where the department leans on the collaborative efforts of the FJC and partners; shared how important these partners are to the department in the services they offer after arrests are made; and how this has allowed them to take services to another level.*

*The Chief reported that the numbers are fairly steady. He then shared the following numbers for total calls for service (TCFS) and domestic-related calls year-to-date (2020 vs. 2021) comparing the number of domestic violence calls to the domestic violence intimate partner (IP) calls.*

TCFS 2020		TCFS 2021		CHANGE
Total Calls	23,535	Total Calls	21,573	-8%
Domestic	307	Domestic	245	-20%
Domestic- IP	500	Domestic- IP	525	+5%

*The Chief pointed out that every one of these cases do not end up with an arrest because they are required to have probable cause to make an arrest. He noted that overall, the domestic numbers are down 20% and stressed that the IP numbers are the most impactful, which show a 5% increase. He called attention to the huge dip in numbers from January 2021 through March 2021 but pointed out there is still a lot of work that needs to be done which is why the collaborative efforts are important and why it is so important to have the FJC and partners in place. In the Chief's opinion, the biggest focus for the Police Department is the offender accountability and this is the reason the Domestic Violence Initiative was put back in place many years ago. He stressed the need to keep the focus on the offenders. He shared that out of the 14 homicides in High Point last year, three were domestic related and mentioned.*

*He stressed that this problem is not going away; expressed appreciation to the on-going efforts of people like Council Member Williams staying on top of things; expressed appreciation to the efforts the City Council puts on it; the more focus put on it as a city, people are going to shy away from doing these things; and the goal is to put offenders in jail and help victims.*

*Following his presentation, Chief Stroud asked if there were any questions for him or Ms. Johnson.*

*Chairman Jones asked the Chief to expound on the domestic violence versus intimate partner domestic violence. Chief Stroud explained there are two different classifications for domestic violence: domestic violence is any kind of domestic related call and intimate*

*partner domestic violence calls delineate relationships such as spouses/partners living together having children in common, etc.....*

*Chairman Jones inquired about the 100% increase nationally in internet crimes against children and asked what crimes would fall into this category. Chief Stroud replied there are numerous crimes and expressed frustration for law enforcement because it takes a lot of technology resources and is extremely expensive to combat. He noted there are two things that he felt the department does not hit enough: cybercrimes and elder abuse. He explained that the department is trying to ramp up efforts, but they have never had money allocated for this purpose until the last couple of years, and yet they continue to see the cases roll in which is quite disturbing. Ms. Johnson added that with kids being remote for so long, parents think the computers are safe because they were issued by the school, but they are only safe when accessing the school's firewall network. She spoke to how this opens the door to sexual predators and how this has caused a spike.*

*Chairman Jones inquired about the main types of elder abuse that is being reported. Interim Chief Stroud replied that some of it is physical, a lot of it is fraud related where elderly individuals don't have all their mental faculties and are being taken advantage of.*

*Committee Member Williams felt that it would be great to get the word out about Camp HOPE because there are so many in the community that would love to contribute. Ms. Johnson explained that they actually take referrals from their partner agencies identifying children who live in homes with domestic violence to attend the camp. She spoke to how this is a totally community funded program; how the High Point community has been incredibly generous in funding High Point children to attend the camp; how they get private donations; there are some grant funds and other things that maintain the program; information can be found on their website; they solicit volunteers; the first year of camp was in 2016 and they have done it five years now; 100% of the children involved have stayed in school while a majority of them have entered school after attending the summer camp and will go a grade higher in subjects (i.e. from a "C" to a "B").*

*Interim Chief Stroud agreed that the Camp HOPE message does need to be pushed as strong as ever because of all the challenges coming out of COVID and noted it is a wonderful tool to help deter children from becoming hard core offenders.*

*Committee Member Williams asked staff to help get the word out about Camp HOPE. He also touched on the importance of keeping things in the forefront and conversations going with our legislators so they can lobby for the cause at the state and federal levels. He voiced kudos to everyone for all the work that is being done and strongly felt it needs to stay heavily pressed by the City Council as a whole and kept in the forefront. Chairman Jones shared that he, Mayor Wagner, and Councilman Holmes attended a ribbon cutting yesterday and he referenced the FJC because they were talking about how the changes are coming to doctors' offices/businesses and how to make the facilities more welcoming and comfortable for consultations.*

*Committee Member Johnson wholeheartedly agreed with Committee Member Williams' suggestion to get the word out and keep it in the forefront. He thanked Chief Stroud for mentioning the elder abuse because he did not have that on his radar.*

*Prior to adjourning the meeting, Committee Member Williams asked the Chief if he could provide an update on the officers who were injured at the shooting incident at 2912 W. English Road. Chief Stroud shared that: all three officers who were shot during that*

*incident are doing great; one has returned to work; they all are expected to make full recoveries. He also shared that there was a Greensboro officer that was shot during that incident who was hit in the hand with shotgun pellets and that he is recovering and doing well.*

**ADJOURNMENT**

*Chairman Jones asked if there were any additional comments/questions. Hearing none, he asked if there were any objections to adjourning the meeting. There being none, the meeting adjourned at 4:45 p.m.*

Respectfully Submitted,

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Victor Jones, Chairman

Attest:

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Lisa B. Vierling, City Clerk