

City of High Point

*Municipal Office Building
211 S. Hamilton Street
High Point, NC 27260*



Minutes

Wednesday, November 18, 2020

4:00 PM

3rd Floor, Council Chambers

Public Safety Committee

Victor Jones, Chair

Britt Moore

Tyrone Johnson

Chris Williams

Mayor Jay Wagner (Alternate)

Mayor Pro Tem (Alternate)

As part of the City of High Point's on-going COVID-19 mitigation efforts, in-person attendance will not be allowed at this meeting. Instead, the meeting will be live-streamed and the public can listen to the meeting as it is being live-streamed by clicking on the following link www.HighPointNC.gov/VirtualPublicMeeting.

Public Safety Committee - Council Member Jones, Chair

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Jones called the meeting to order at 4:04 p.m. Following a virtual roll call by Chairman Jones, the following attendance by Committee Members was duly noted.

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

Staff Present:

Randy McCaslin, Interim City Manager; Greg Ferguson, Assistant City Manager; Interim Police Chief Travis Stroud; Major Petula Sellars; Lt. Pete Abernathy; Mike McNair, Director of Community Development & Housing; Lori Loosemore, Codes Enforcement Manager; Mary Brooks, Deputy City Clerk; and Lisa Vierling, City Clerk

Others Present:

Dr. Brandon Lenoir, Assistant Professor Political Communication, High Point University,
High Point University Undergraduate Students (Blue Lit Street Project): Penn Cosler, Hannah Gutenstein, Kimberly Jenkins, and Valeria Maya

Dr. Ellen Cochran, Executive Director, Mental Health Associates of the Triad

Present 4 - Council Member Christopher Williams, Council Member Britt Moore, Chair Victor Jones, and Council Member Tyrone Johnson

PRESENTATION OF ITEMS

[2020-469](#)

Presentation-High Point University Undergraduate Student Committee on the Blue Lit Road Project

A committee of High Point University (HPU) graduate students will make a presentation to the Public Safety Committee on the Blue Lit Road Project

The High Point University Undergraduate students provided a project overview on the Blue Lit Road Project that they are proposing. They are proposing a Blue Light style security system in the City of High Point. In Phase 1, they are proposing the installation of four blue lights at the following locations:

Two at the corner of Main Street/Lexington Avenue
One near the bus stop across from Rockspring Road
One near the bus stop across from Guilford Avenue

The students identified the following benefits of the blue lights:

Increases safety
Increases foot traffic for a more viable downtown
emits light to brighten up city streets

They mentioned other cities with "college-type" settings have also installed these lights such as Grand Rapids, Michigan and they are starting to see these blue lights coming from the universities and being placed in the cities. They spoke to High Point's current high crime rate; their love for the community; and how they are always wanting to give back to the community, including supporting local businesses.

In Phase 2, they recommend placing the blue lights in the downtown area by the new stadium, hospital area, and possibly one by the train station. In Phase 3, they recommend the placement of the blue lights in other locations such as shopping centers, grocery stores, etc....

The students are estimating the cost for installation of the four blue lights in Phase 1 to be around \$20,000--depending on the exact model chosen and based these costs on the current blue light system that High Point University uses which is "Talkaphone." Additional costs would include drilling of the concrete for installation and maintenance costs which are estimated about \$200 per year, per pole.

At the conclusion of the presentation, the students provided an email address where they can be contacted with any questions:
bluelightroadproject@gmail.com.

Committee Member Williams inquired as to if all the lights have cameras and the students replied that some do and some do not--depending on the exact model. He expressed appreciation for the aurora that the lights emit on University Parkway at night; the students agreed and reiterated how the lights would create an atmosphere of safety.

Chairman Jones asked Interim Police Chief Travis Stroud if the proposed

locations for installation of the blue lights co-relate with any high calls for service in these areas. Chief Stroud spoke to how the Police Department is data-driven and will always look at the numbers to make an analysis to ensure efficiency. He also spoke to the lights enhancing safety and agreed that the blue lights do give an aura to the aesthetics in an area. He expressed concerns about false alerts and the possibility that the blue lights, when activated, could inundate the Police Department and noted that the department is already answering 350-400 calls daily. He commended the students for their initiative and proactive thinking, but would like to see how these blue lights are working on other college campuses to get some idea of the pros and the cons.

Committee Member Moore asked if there might be a blueprint for the blue lights outside of a college campus setting and the students responded by saying that there are other cities that use the blue lights such as Greenville, NC and spoke to one of their group members actually living in Greenville, reached out to the City Hall, but has not yet received a response.

Committee Member Moore asked the students about their role going forward once the project is off the ground and if it would then be handed over to the city. The students advised that they are all graduating seniors and initially planned to ask that this be included in the 2021-2022 budget, but they would definitely be coming back to High Point for Alumni weekend and other events that High Point holds and to revisit their favorite local bars and restaurants. Either way, they stated that High Point is growing, so more and more students would be coming to High Point.

Chairman Jones asked if there were any questions for the students. Hearing none, Committee Member Moore wished the students a Happy Thanksgiving.

For Information Only

[2020-470](#)

Presentation-Results of the Police Department's Traffic Safety Initiative

Staff will provide a presentation on the results of the Police Department's Traffic Initiative

Interim Police Chief Travis Stroud introduced Lt. Pete Abernathy, who is over the High Point Police Departments Traffic Division and Major Petula Sellars, who runs the Field Ops North which falls into the Traffic Division. He provided a quick overview and touched briefly on the reasons for the traffic surge. The Chief spoke to the increase in traffic inside the city; the increase in bad driving behaviors; and the significant amount of dangerous driving they have observed. He talked about their job at the Police Department is to keep the community safe and how this is a holistic approach that extends far beyond violent crimes, but includes driving enforcement. Realizing the need to focus on the speeding and aggressive driving, the idea of the traffic surge initiative was put into motion.

Lt. Abernathy advised the mission of the Traffic Division is to do traffic

enforcement and crash investigation. He mentioned the massive rush of traffic fatalities over the past year, especially the past several months that resulted in 13 fatal crashes with 14 deaths involved. In reviewing the data on crash reports and traffic stops, they noticed that many involved speeds over 100 mph on well-traveled city streets such as S. Main, Johnson, Oakview, Brentwood, etc.....) and it was realized that some different enforcement was needed to squelch this trend. So, the idea of the traffic surge was born and they picked three areas every day during a two-week period where they would patrol and surge to get those individuals doing the dangerous driving with the goal to educate them and try to slow them down. Lt. Abernathy explained the core of this was to capture that little bit of audience that was not getting their attention and prevent them from moving on to worst driving behaviors.

During the two-week traffic safety surge, they worked with the city's Marketing Department to get the word out, and Mayor Wagner was featured in a video to put some support behind it as well. The locations for the traffic surge were determined by the crash report data which revealed the date/time that crashes occurred and this aided in them drilling down the location, specific day and hours these crashes were happening. A three-year look back revealed over 1,300 crashes that occurred on Eastchester Drive; the next highest crash location was N. Main Street at 500; then S. Main Street at 350-400; and the next level down was the Johnson Street corridor. In addition to these locations, they also added N. Centennial because of the huge number of calls they were getting from citizens who live on N. Centennial that are impacted by the HPU traffic and traffic traveling into downtown. He spoke to consistency being the key and getting the message to the drivers to reset their driving behaviors with the ultimate goal of making driving safer in High Point.

At the conclusion of the two weeks, the officers stopped 989 drivers; 60% for speeding; 10% seat belt violations; and the remaining 30% was for other unsafe driving behaviors. Out of the 989 stopped, 552 were issued traffic citations and 437 were issued written warnings. Lt. Abernathy stated he was most proud of the number "zero" because there have been no additional traffic fatalities since the initiative was started so he felt the message was definitely getting out.

Chairman Jones asked if this is a temporary initiative, or if they plan to keep it ongoing to increase the enforcement. Lt. Abernathy replied that it would be ongoing and another surge is planned for the week of Thanksgiving and possibly another during the Christmas holidays.

Committee Member Williams inquired about the signs that display your speed and if this was part of this initiative. Lt. Abernathy noted those are radar signs and used as part of the pre-surge data collection. These signs track the vehicle speeds, date/time, etc.... so, leading up to the surge, the signs are deployed in some of the areas such as N. Centennial to get a better idea of the best time to

place officers in the areas to be most efficient.

Chief Stroud commended his staff and stated he was very proud of what they have accomplished with very little direction.

For Information Only

[2020-471](#)

Presentation-Police Department's Program with the Mental Health Associates of the Triad

Staff will provide a presentation on the Police Department's Program with the Mental Health Associates of the Triad

Historically speaking, Interim Police Chief Travis Stroud, advised they have had a long-standing history of failing to reach out to the needs of the officers and spoke to how officers tend to internalize a lot of their problems due to the stress of the job. He explained that many officers are historically awful at not reaching out for assistance because they see it as a stigma/weakness. He spoke to the big push across the country for law enforcement is mental health and assistance programs for officers and one of the biggest goals at the Police Department is the retention of their officers and a big piece of this puzzle is the officers well-being (both physically and mentally).

At this time, the Chief turned the floor over to Major Petula Sellars, who has been a big catalyst for this and commended her for the phenomenal job that she continues to do.

Major Sellars shared that when she started with the High Point Police Department almost 20 years ago, she was taught the importance of self-care early on and was encouraged when doing non-police related things to spend time with family, exercise, and take care of yourself. She spoke to relaying that message to numerous officers as well.

Major Sellars explained the Police Department does have a group of officers/employees that are part of a Peer Support Team that basically identifies another officer that may be in crisis and offers support to the officer. She further explained that they realized they were identifying things that were well beyond the capabilities of the Peer Support Team because they are not certified counselors. She spoke to how 2020 has been an extremely challenging year for everyone; the negative effect that COVID-19 has had on some of the officers and family members; and many officers were experiencing breakdowns.

As a result, she reached out to Dr. Kim Soban, Clinical Director with the Mental Health Associates (MHA) of the Triad, and a former police officer, and started having meetings, discussions in an effort to formulate a plan to offer assistance to the officers. She spoke to how MHA has been phenomenal; how they do

consultations in an effort to identify an officer in crisis because of a relationship, critical incident, etc..... which varies from officer to officer. MHA also provides trainings for officers that helps identify the various types of mental health awareness that they see on the street and helps to formulate a response. Additionally, MHA also offers assistance in the case of tact callout incident such as an individual barricaded in a residence, and they can actually respond, guide, and offer advice to the supervisors while on the scene. Major Sellars noted that although the officers have used the city's EAP program, due to COVID, the EAP counselors/therapists are no longer able to meet with the officers in person and they are very reluctant to talk to a counselor/therapist over the phone.

Major Sellars felt this would be hugely successful in regards to the continued care of officers and spoke to the health and mental well-being of the officers would make them more successful as an agency.

Committee Member Williams spoke to how huge this is and how it resonates far beyond the officer/family members in the agency and one of the biggest road blocks in dealing with some of the things in the community involves mental health.

Major Sellars gave accolades to the Chief, her colleagues; and MHA of the Triad.

Chairman Jones shared that he has served on the MHA of the Triad Board for the past three years and asked Dr. Soban to present the information to the Public Safety Committee. He shared that because Dr. Soban is a former police officer, she truly understands all the mental challenges, disorders, etc.....and stress that officers are faced with and would be able to officer assistance to the officers who are dealing with mental health stress, anxiety, etc..... Major Sellars totally agreed that Dr. Soban and MHA would definitely be extremely advantageous to the officers.

At this time, Chairman Jones asked Ellen Cochran, Executive Director, Mental Health Associates of the Triad, to come forward. Ms. Cochran relayed that she did not have much more to add to Chief Stroud's and Major Sellars' comments, but that one of the best things she has done for MHA was hiring Dr. Soban and she would be the one providing most of the excellent care the officers will be receiving. She also spoke to attending the initial meeting where she met Chief Stroud, Major Sellars, and some of the officers for the first time; walking away from that meeting favorably impressed that a firm foundation was already in place at the Police Department; the vision already in place; this being the next logical step; and felt the entire High Point community should be very proud of the Police Department.

Committee Member Moore highly agreed and, as a citizen, thanked Chief Stroud, Lt. Abernathy, and Major Sellars for the presentations that show the department is proactive, not just reactive, and taking something that's already good and making

it better. He spoke to how the COVID situation is stressing every single fiber of fabric the country has got right now; how the police officer profession is quite stressful; that he is thankful and supports the officers; and hopes this will have an internal positive effect for the stresses the officers face daily.

Chairman Jones felt one of the responsibilities of being a city leader is to make sure that the officers know that the city leadership supports and cares about them and their families. He thanked everyone for presenting during the meeting and expressed excitement about the announcement.

Committee Member Johnson agreed with Chairman Jones that it does go far beyond the officer and touches their family as well. He shared kudos with the staff in putting this program together and there is definitely a need for it.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no objections to adjourning the meeting, Chairman Jones announced that the meeting was adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lisa B. Vierling, City Clerk

Victor Jones, Chairman