ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

January 14, 2019, 6:00 PM.
Assembly Chambers - Municipal Building

MINUTES

I. ROLL CALL

Deputy Mayor Maria Gladziszewski called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

Assemblymembers present: Beth Weldon, Mary Becker, Jesse Kiehl, Loren Jones, Rob Edwardson, Carole Triem, Wade Bryson, Maria Gladziszewski and Michelle Hale (telephonic)

Assemblymembers absent: None

Staff present: City Manager Rorie Watt, City Attorney Rob Palmer, Deputy Manager Mila Cosgrove, Municipal Clerk Beth McEwen, Chief Housing Officer Scott Ciambor; Community Development Director Jill Maclean, Emergency Manager Tom Mattice, Finance Director Bob Bartholomew, Port Director Carl Uchytil, Port Engineer Gary Gillette; Police Chief Ed Mercer, Deputy Police Chief David Campbell, Fire Chief Rich Etheridge

II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda was approved as presented.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. November 19, 2018 Assembly Committee of the Whole Draft Minutes

MOTION by Ms. Becker to approve the minutes with minor corrections. *Hearing no objection, the minutes of the November 19, 2018 Committee of the Whole meeting were approved.*

IV. AGENDA TOPICS

A. Blueprint Downtown Update

Paul Voelckers and Pat Race gave a presentation on the Blueprint Downtown efforts so far as well as additional opportunities for the public to participate in upcoming events. They have held two walking tours so far and another walking tour is scheduled for Saturday, January 19 which will focus on Arts & Culture. There will be a public meeting held on January 24 at Centennial Hall 6:30-8:30 p.m. and will include interactive methods for public input. The public can also learn more on the Blueprint Downtown website or through Community Development Department.

Some of the key topics which have been discussed by the Steering Committee include: Business Vitality, Safety and Services for the homeless, Tourism and mitigation of tourism impacts.

Mr. Voelckers, Mr. Race and staff answered Assemblymembers' questions regarding the Cultural Gateway that historically has been an Assembly priority for the area and how that has been incorporated into the wayfinding signage. Mr. Kiehl encouraged the Steering Committee and consultants to work with CDD staff to ensure the goal for a Cultural Gateway is not lost in the planning. Additional Q&A took place with respect to the discussion of the Archipelago project and Mr. Voelckers said that Mr. Uchytil and his staff have been present at the public meetings to speak on it and that there has been both positive and negative public comments about the city's involvement in the project.

Mayor Weldon asked if they have reached out to the Legislature to ask for their input. Mr. Voelckers said they had not yet reached out to the legislators but that would be part of the ongoing efforts.

Discussion then turned to strategies to encourage Juneauites to come to town both in winter and summer. They also discussed year round residential occupancy, and how business evolution might look if the city employed some incentivized housing options to encourage more multi-use facilities and new downtown housing options. Mr. Bryson asked if the study included data on how many housing units have been lost in the last 10-15 years and what some of the potential areas for housing in the downtown core might be. Mr. Voelckers explained that CDD staff was working on a database of housing in the downtown area. Mr. Edwardson said he lives in the valley and that housing isn't a fix all. He asked how you get people from the valley to come and do stuff downtown. Mr. Voelckers and Mr. Race said this is a tricky question as it isn't mutually exclusive. Some of their discussions have been on how downtown areas can be used commercially, recreationally, culturally, and also tie it into the importance of a place to have meaningful community experiences such as the 4th of July celebrations, Celebration, the Alaska Folk Festival. Mr. Race said that many of the comments about this have also touched on transportation issues.

Ms. Gladziszewski thanked them for the presentation. She stated that one of the ways she found that they used to engage the public was to vote using pennies for their top priorities/issues. She asked how many participated in that exercise and Mr. Voelckers said they did it two separate times, once in October and then again during Gallery Walk. They had over 130 people participate in the exercise.

Ms. Gladziszewski noted that anyone wishing for more information on this can to to the website Blueprintdowntown.org. Mr. Jones also noted that the Steering Committee will hold its next meeting on January 17 in the Assembly Chambers.

B. JPD - Update on Crime

Police Chief Ed Mercer gave a presentation on crime statistics in Juneau.

He explained that under the Uniform Crime Reporting program, there are 29 crimes tracked. In that program Part I crimes are the 8 most serve crimes: Homicide, Rape, Robbery, Aggravated Assault, Burglary, Theft/Larceny, Motor Vehicle Theft, and Arson. the Part II crimes are considered lesser crimes and less data collection is required for Part II crimes.

He provided a comparison table showing the increase of Part I crimes from 2013-2017. Overall Part I crimes in 2013 totaled 1206 whereas in 2017 they totaled 1994. Statistically, 2017 was the highest rate of arrests in the last five years and although they only have data for the first three quarters of 2018, it is coming out as the second highest rate of arrests in the past five years.

Chief Mercer's presentation also focused on the breakdown of the calls for service vs. officer initiated calls. He and Deputy Chief David Campbell explained the correlation relating to the higher the crime rate, the higher the calls for service and the fewer number of officer initiated calls. The high rates also came during a period in 2017 when there were down 13 officers and at this time they are down 8 officers and that reduction in force also contributes to fewer officer initiated calls.

Chief Mercer also discussed the pros and cons of new technology with the use of video footage from body worn cameras and in-car cameras as well as privately owned surveillance cameras and how that has increased the amount of time an officer spends on each individual case. He answered a number of questions from Assemblymembers about the retention and processing of those types of evidence and he stated that JPD is looking at options with software and other solutions to take the burden off the sworn officers in processing that evidence.

Mr. Bryson asked about any statistics regarding conviction rates and Chief Mercer explained that while he doesn't have that information, they could request that from the prosecutors.

C. JPD - Update on Workforce Issues

Chief Mercer then gave a presentation on JPD staffing, recruitment and retention comparing what ideal full staffing would look like as well what current staffing levels are.

When fully staffed, JPD has a total of 97 employees: 57 sworn police officers and 37 civilian staff. Out of those 57 sworn positions, 49 are currently filled and 8 are vacant. of those 49 filled positions, three officers are in training so 46 officers are currently doing the work of 57 positions which represents a 19.3% operational vacancy factor.

Chief Mercer showed the anticipated retirement numbers along with the 2018 recruitment efforts. Nine officers were hired in 2018 and they have stepped up their advertising efforts with the new fiscal year as well as signing an agreement with the US Army PaYS program in December. They also held three officer prep test events in September which was attended by 14 potential candidates, four of which have gone through the testing process this past month. He said there are two individuals currently going through the entry level candidate selection process who will be attending the academy in Sitka in February.

The chief explained that previously testing of new candidates was offered twice a year and since he became chief, he changed that to offering testing four times a year. The hiring process takes a minimum of 90 days which is cut down from the previous 180 days. They are trying to get people through the process quicker and he said once they are hired, it takes 10 months for an officer to come up to speed. For dispatchers it takes 6-7 months of training before they can go solo. He explained that over the past ten years, 18 officers left JPD (and didn't return), primarily to go to other police departments. Over that same time, six officers, not included in the 18 above, who had left due to family and other reasons have returned. In 2018, JPD was fully staffed in the criminal investigation unit and they also added two civilian investigative officers. He noted that during 2018, they offered signing bonuses for new officers and out of the six new officers hired, five of them received signing bonuses.

Chief Mercer then gave an overview of the Dispatch unit and civilian staff. They have 12 dispatcher positions of which, currently seven are filled and five are vacant. He said that vacancy rate leads to higher overtime rates and lower moral and they would like to fill all the dispatcher positions.

Chief Mercer then answered a number of questions from Assemblymembers about overtime pay for sworn and civilian staff, competitive wages in comparison to other departments across the state as well as the lower 48, the amount the department spends annually on recruitment and relocation and the timing for training and full time patrol duties. Chief Mercer also answered questions about the lower moral due to the increased vacancy factor and resulting workloads as well as the benefits packages and differences between a defined benefits vs. a defined contribution model and the difference that makes in being able to retain staff. When asked about what JPD is doing to recruit dispatchers, Chief Mercer said they are looking at possibly implementing a tier system so new hires can work their way up to different levels. He said that with respect to the dispatchers, they are in a challenging position in a room for 12 hours a day and varying workloads. They do not seem to leave to go to other police departments but they do apply for other positions with in the organization. Two dispatchers are leaving their dispatch positions to move into Community Service Officer (CSO) positions.

Ms. Gladziszewski thanked the Chief for his presentations and answering everyone's questions.

D. CCFR - Update on Fitch Study

Fire Chief Rich Etheridge gave a presentation on the recruitment, retention and an update on the Fitch report from Capital City Fire Rescue (CCFR).

Presently there are 39 Front line staff with three vacancies, 10 Administrative staff, 4 Seasonal FF/EMT's, 52 Volunteers, 5 Cadets, and 11 new volunteers currently going through the intake process. They have a fairly young demographic on the force and are currently experiencing a transition from the three tier retirement system to the Tier Four staff. Another major shift is occurring with the volunteers. Previously volunteers would serve 15-20 years and that is now down to 3.7 average years of service. They currently only have one long time volunteer with 20 years of service. Every department across the state is recruiting and trying to find volunteers as well as career staff. Universal training programs have been good but they have also made it easier for staff to move to other states and departments.

In looking at solutions, they are trying to grow our own by bringing kids of 14-18 years old and getting them interested. Previously the minimum age was 21 but that has been lowered to 18 years old and that has helped. They are also trying to grow our own paramedics. There is an online program to do the didactic training with travel for testing. One person has successfully gone through the program and they now have a steady stream of paramedics coming in over the next couple of years. They have two new Paramedics who will graduate by this summer and two more are in the works to graduate in the next 18 months. Paramedics can sign a contract to work for 5 years and they get a $25,000 signing bonus which the Chief hopes will slow down the reduction in paramedics.

Currently working with Human Resources to create a flex position for an Emergency Trauma Technician (ETT), especially for seasonal work to drive an ambulance. It is not yet implemented but it is a stepping stone they are working on. They have a recruitment and retention committee on staff and with volunteers and they look forward to hearing their recommendations. He said they have recently boosted advertising using video and all their new recruits who tested from down south had seen the video which can be viewed on the CCFR website.

They are currently working on how volunteers are compensated and will move that forward to the Assembly. They are currently in talks with UAS and State of AK to form partnerships for career paths so they can go to school during the school terms and then live at the Fire Training Center in the summer time and help the instructors at the Fire Training Center with marine training. Their hope is to give them housing and a summer job so they are more likely to sign on when they are done with schooling to become career staff or volunteers.

The volunteers have created their own Facebook page to reach out and coordinate small training activities and stay connected with each other. They also have career mentors in the department who have been assigned to each of the volunteers making sure they have the equipment they need as well as making them aware of training opportunity. They are also working to identify areas that can be improved with run cards so that volunteers are not being called out to respond to someone who has flu like symptoms and are reducing the volunteers having to respond to unnecessary calls.

Active 911 has been implemented and it is application for cell phones and works similar to a pager and vibrates or sets a tone off when there is a call. It provides a map with where the call is at and it gives a brief description of what the call is. The categories are pretty broad but if it says medical call, most of the volunteers can ignore it but if there is something they need to respond to, they can see that in the brief description. It is not 100% reliable yet but it is a good adjunct to the pager system as most individuals are not more than 3-4 feet away from their phones.

He said they are looking at small team leadership training with their volunteers so they aren't expected to run a whole station but rather to concentrate on specific tasks.

With respect to near term solutions, they are currently working towards implementing a Ground Emergency Medical Transport (GEMT) Medicaid Supplement Reimbursement Program. That allows them to recover 50% of the money that they aren't allowed to collect from their Medicaid transports.

Right now they can only bill between $400-$1,000 for a medical transport but it costs much more than that to do the actual transport. This allows them to include the total costs associated, including the expenses for fuel and heating of the transport vehicles. They are currently doing some trials and testing of the program and it is anticipated that it will bring in an additional $800,000 of revenues per year. They hope that by late spring/early summer to finish the testing phase of the program and turn in the first funding requests. The one caveat is that those funds are required to go back to Medicaid patients somehow. The department can use those funds towards ambulance replacement, training personnel, etc... it is up to the municipality to determine how to spend those funds but they do need to benefit Medicaid patients somehow.

Chief Etheridge then gave a brief overview of the Fitch Report and its recommendations especially for the benefit of the new Assemblymembers who weren't on last year when the report came out. He said one of the recommendations from the report that CCFR honed in on was to bring on a third ambulance on board. They have been working through that process and will soon be putting a third ambulance team on the road. Another recommendation included providing a 24 hour shift commander/paramedic/training officer type of position. He explained that there are as many types of staffing structures as there are fire departments across the nation and they are looking at what will be the most cost effective model for CCFR and how to structure that to get the most bang for our buck.

Other recommendations in the Fitch Report included adding a Lemon Creek station with 2 staff cross staffing with a Quint (Fire and Ladder Truck combo) plus ambulance and then to eventually eliminate the cross staffing at Lemon Creek with a four person team so it is a stand alone station. They did recommend that as the call volume grows, to add a 4th 12-hour ambulance. Chief Etheridge said he doesn't see that need at this time, the call volume has plateaued out and he is not sure what it will look like next year with the increase in tourism.

Other recommendations related to volunteers, staffing structures, responses, training, service levels so the community members receiving the service don't know they are receiving help from volunteer or career path. Trying to stratify the dept so everyone has an opportunity to serve in some way. They are working on revising the allocation method of paying volunteers that has been worked on by a group of career and volunteers. They hope to bring a proposal to the Assembly for approval via resolution in near future. One of the recommendations from the report was to re-institute the scholarship program and incentives for live ins. They have had a successful return on their investment with those dollars previously and are looking at revitalizing it.

Other recommendations dealt with improved communications and reviewing dispatching procedures and equipment by using a third party. They have worked on improving internal communications, Facebook, etc... As for the dispatch improvements, they are working with JPD on a Homeland Security Grant for $150,000 to improve dispatch.

Chief Etheridge then touched on all the various ways they are implementing improvements with staff and volunteers including filling the positions for a third ambulance, reviewing multiple staffing models to see where improvements and cost effectiveness can be implemented and a new volunteer compensation program. He talked about the recruitment and retention committee for volunteers as well as the Alaska Firefighters Association which just put together the Fireman's Ball. The Auke Bay station has undergone significant improvements and is a more comfortable and desirable place to be.

He noted that turnout times are improving and they are doing what they can to trim off anytime at the station that it takes to respond to the call but that the one area they do not want to push is the driving time as they do not want the crews taking risks during driving. That part of the response time can only be improved by new station locations. He also said that they are pursuing funding for new lifting devices to help pay for the gurneys in the ambulances. This in turn will help reduce the reliance on engines having to respond to medical calls alongside the ambulances.

With respect to next steps, he said they are working at how to keep people here longer. Part of that process is better defining the department command structure and the recruitment roles and path to get there is identified for everybody. With all the new people coming on board, they want to make sure that everyone has all the necessary equipment they need to do the job they are needed for the type of jobs they are assigned to. In looking at the long range plans, they might be looking to the next round of sales tax funding to try to pursue a Lemon Creek department. They are working on small team leadership levels in the volunteer ranks and also trying to identify triggers/markers for when the various growth models for the department needs to kick in. They also are formalizing their relationships with social service agencies and community navigators to try to ensure that the persons needing social service receive those connections since CCFR is often called in as the department of last resort for persons needing social service help.

In summary he said they are a very complex department meeting multiple missions with vast differing needs for volunteers and staff. The entire staff is extremely driven to provide the best service possible to the community. The biggest frustration for firefighters is if they see a need and they aren't allowed to solve it. They are problem solvers and are programmed to take a call and solve the problem within 15-20 minutes so trying to develop programs and solve problems long term can be somewhat frustrating to them that it can't be done immediately.

Chief Etheridge then answered a number of questions from Assemblymembers regarding the recruitment and retention as well as how best to grow our own and the formalization of the role of volunteers while also being flexible in how best to mix the various categories and roles that fit well for both the individual volunteers as well as the department.

Additional questions included how many volunteers were at the entry level (18-19) and how many volunteer EMTs there are (11). What the volunteer numbers are, what roles they have and what their time commitments are. Chief Etheridge explained that the jobs the volunteers can do cover every type of job in the department with the exception of running the ladder trucks and staffing the Airport equipment. The time commitment varies depending on each individuals' available time. Those serving as a Firefighter/EMT are required to serve an additional day per month. Some volunteers donate 4-8 hours/month whereas others volunteer 30-40/month.

Questions then turned to the effect the reduction in dispatch has had on the work of the CCFR and what the moral at CCFR is at this time. Chief Etheridge said that dispatch is doing an amazing job. With respect to moral, it fluctuates but has generally been up due to the new ambulance coming on and volunteer moral is on an upswing.

Assemblymembers then asked about the Fitch Report and the role of the Assembly in moving forward or if CCFR was going to be working on those and bringing recommendations back to the Assembly. Mr. Jones asked that in light of all the new development happening in Auke Bay if there was any thought of first having career staff at Auke Bay rather than looking at Lemon Creek. Chief Etheridge explained that the call volume is greater in the Lemon Creek area than Auke Bay and that is the reason they are concentrating on Lemon Creek first. He said the immediate need they had was to get the new ambulance on the road and the next step will be to look at a new apparatus but that they are trying to grow the department in stages.

Chief Etheridge then explained some of the details behind the statistics for the different stations including the Airport Station and how that is staffed. Mr. Edwardson asked about why they are heavily relying on the Fitch Report rather than using the guidelines as outlined in the NFPA 1710 (National Fire Protection Association standards). Chief Etheridge explained that the NFPA 1710 isn't a good fit for CCFR as it is designed for purely career staffed departments. He said that the NFPA 1720 are the guidelines for strictly volunteer departments and CCFR falls between those two. He said that very few departments in the nation fit the NFPA guidelines as they are set it up for an ideal situation that has lots of funding and lots of personnel and while it is a goal to strive for, it is difficult for anyone to attain.

Ms. Gladziszewski thanked Chief Etheridge for the presentation and said they will look forward to hearing more when it comes to them during the budget cycle.

E. CCFR - Update on Workforce Issues

F. Update on Action Strategies from Public Safety Task force - Informational Item

Deputy Manager Mila Cosgrove said that last year at this time the Public Safety Task Force submitted its report to the Assembly. The task force had several recommendations and much of those were provided with an update in the packet as well the recruitment and staffing recommendations which were just covered by Police Chief Mercer. She said that many of the recommendations were fairly broad and were driving down to some root cause issues that were generating crime in the community. Some of the recommendations were determined not to be workable at the end of the day such as the misdemeanor probation officer. They did support additional staffing in the district attorney's office which they received.

She said that some of the more tricky pieces had to do with treatment and diversion. Those are all works in progress and she had a long conversation with Bradley Grigg, the Chief Behavioral Officer at BRH. He is working on bed to bed options to work with individuals to go from incarceration into treatment as needed. She said she doesn't know if there are any good solutions to receive treatment while they are incarcerated. Some of that work is out of the control of CBJ. The Juneau Community Foundation was hired to do a service gap survey and they are eager to see the outcomes of that.

A lot of discussion of the task force focused on legislation at the state level. SB91 had some unintended consequences and SB54 tried to modify that. The perfect balance has not been met yet and those are some of the big ticket items to watch as the new session begins.

V. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Assembly Committee of the Whole, Ms. Gladziszewski adjourned the meeting at 8:26 p.m. so the next meeting could begin.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth McEwen, MMC
Municipal Clerk