

CITY OF BELLEVUE
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Study Session

January 21, 2020
6:00 p.m.

Council Conference Room
Bellevue, Washington

PRESENT: Mayor Robinson, Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis, and Councilmembers Barksdale, Lee, Robertson, Stokes, and Zahn

ABSENT: None.

1. Executive Session

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m., with Mayor Robinson presiding. There was no Executive Session.

2. Study Session Items

(a) Firearm and Community Safety Update

City Manager Brad Miyake introduced staff's update regarding firearm and community safety.

Nathan McCommon, Deputy City Manager, recalled that last June, the Council considered a Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA) application regarding firearm safety. The proposal did not move forward. However, he has been working with a community group over the past several months to discuss their interests. He noted the letter in the Council's desk packet listing the group's 10 recommended actions.

Toni Esparza, Assistant Director, Parks and Community Services, said the City's holistic approach to community safety includes an investment of \$7.44 million in the 2019-2020 Human Services Fund. Of that amount, \$5.55 million is targeted for 47 programs correlated to public safety. Ms. Esparza described the investments in youth programming, mental health and substance abuse services, sexual assault and domestic violence assistance, housing services, and legal assistance programs. As an example of one program, Ms. Esparza said the Fire Department's CARES (Citizen Advocates for Referral and Education Services) program responds to individuals in crisis in their homes or elsewhere and refers them to needed resources.

Ms. Esparza said the City operates its own probation program as an investment in community safety and in monitoring and managing risk. The program follows a model of restorative justice and rehabilitation, and the services are responsive to the specific needs of the community.

Police Chief Steve Mylett said that all law enforcement agencies are governed by federal and state laws. In 2019, the Bellevue Police Department responded to 97,000 calls for service. A firearm was present in 0.05 percent of all incidents. Chief Mylett said the recent gang-related homicide was the first murder in Bellevue in more than three years.

Chief Mylett said the Bellevue Police Department addresses firearm safety and gun violence in five areas: 1) background checks, 2) storage/release of firearms, 3) Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs), 4) voluntary surrender or formal waiver of firearm rights, and 5) mental health commitments for individuals in crisis. The department conducts enhanced background checks for all pistol and semi-automatic assault rifle sales and transfers to Bellevue residents to determine whether the person is legally eligible to possess a firearm. The background checks are required for all sales and transfers through licensed dealers, gun shows, online sources, and private parties. If a license application is denied, the information is entered into the state's tracking system for access by other law enforcement agencies. Chief Mylett said that Bellevue's enhanced background check process has been used as a model for other local agencies. If an ineligible person attempts to purchase a firearm in Bellevue, the police department is notified by the State and will investigate to determine whether to file charges.

Chief Mylett said individuals can be required to surrender their firearms to a local law enforcement agency for storage under certain circumstances (i.e., domestic violence, protection orders, and criminal no-contact orders). The firearms are not released back to the person until a thorough background check is completed and the Bellevue Police Department receives a court order to release the weapons. Chief Mylett said the police will notify family and household members with a need to know when the firearm is returned to the individual.

Chief Mylett said the implementation of Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs) in 2017 has had a positive impact on preventing victimization and protecting individuals in crisis. Law enforcement agencies and members of the public are authorized by state law to seek an ERPO to remove firearms from individuals and to block their access to firearms when they are at high risk of harming themselves or others. The law has been used by the Bellevue Police Department 11 times to prevent individuals from possessing firearms when they had expressed suicidal thoughts, were experiencing a mental health crisis, or posed a substantial danger to the public or themselves.

Chief Mylett said that members of the public may voluntarily surrender their firearms to the police department for safekeeping for a minimum of seven days when they are experiencing a mental health crisis. As with court-ordered firearm surrenders, a thorough background check is conducted to confirm the individual's eligibility to possess a firearm before returning it to them.

Involuntary mental health commitments are used by police officers to take an individual experiencing a mental health crisis or drug/alcohol-induced crisis to Overlake Medical Center for

an evaluation. Officers are trained to ask for voluntary consent to retrieve any firearms in the person's possession, and a background check is conducted before the firearms are returned to the individual. Chief Mylett said the Bellevue Fire CARES program provides social services outreach to individuals exhibiting signs of crisis. The police department also partners with the King County Mental Health Crisis Team to assist with situations requiring trained mental health professionals.

Chief Mylett described a number of programs including School Resource Officers (SROs), safe gun storage, community safety outreach, domestic violence victim advocacy, disposal of confiscated firearms, and the test firing of guns. SROs are assigned to local middle schools and high schools and receive advanced training in working with students in a school environment. The police department and school district participate in joint preparedness planning, drills and exercises, and active shooter training.

The police department enforces the new state gun storage requirements of Initiative 1639 and partners with the National Shooting Sports Foundation, which promotes firearm safety and education. The foundation's Project Child Safe program provides firearm safety kits that include educational information and a gun lock. The free kits are available from the police department.

In coordination with the six advisory councils to the Chief of Police, the Bellevue Police Department hosts community safety forums and town hall meetings. The public is welcome to learn about crime prevention and to ask questions about increasing safety in their neighborhoods. Chief Mylett said the City partners with King County and houses a domestic violence advocate within the police department to connect victims to resources and services to enhance their safety.

The police department is authorized by state law to confiscate firearms under certain circumstances. After confiscation, the courts may judicially forfeit the firearms to the police department, which is then allowed to dispose of the firearms. From 2018 to 2019, the Bellevue Police Department destroyed 80 firearms under that law. Chief Mylett said the police department test fires all crime guns, lost or stolen firearms, and forfeited firearms in its possession. The fired cartridges, cases, and shot shells are submitted to the Washington State Patrol lab. The test results are submitted into the Integrated Ballistics Identification System (IBIS) and the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN) for comparison to other shell casings received from crime scenes.

Chief Mylett said the City's community surveys rank public safety as a high priority, and the majority of respondents report that they feel safe or very safe in their neighborhoods and throughout Bellevue. He said the police department's crime prevention specialist works with the community to reduce crime and the fear of crime. The police department will develop a comprehensive firearm safety education program in 2020 and welcomes partnerships with the Bellevue School District, local businesses, and any and all stakeholder groups.

Councilmember Barksdale thanked Chief Mylett and Ms. Esparza for the presentation. Mr. Barksdale asked about the type of data the City is collecting to measure the effectiveness of its programs.

Chief Mylett said the police department collects a lot of data, which informs decisions about where to place resources. They monitor trends and deploy resources to combat crime, including gun violence. The challenge for Bellevue is that the crime rates are so low that it makes it difficult to identify trends. Chief Mylett said there is more that they can do and they are always looking for opportunities to learn from data collection.

Ms. Esparza said staff will present the Human Services Needs Update to the Council on February 3. The update process includes public outreach by telephone, community forums, online surveys, and interviews with providers and individuals who receive services. The data is analyzed and informs the Human Services Commission's recommendations for funding.

Councilmember Stokes said it is good to hear and to let the public know all that the City is doing. He complimented the SRO program and the relationships it builds with students and the community. Mr. Stokes thanked the public for their activism related to gun violence. He expressed support for discussing social justice topics during the Council's annual retreat.

Responding to Mr. Stokes, Mr. McCommon noted the new 2020 initiatives regarding programming elements. Mr. McCommon said that future efforts will become more informed by the collection of data.

Councilmember Zahn thanked staff for the holistic approach to gun violence and crime prevention. She suggested providing the gun safety kits at community events, such as the previous day's health fair.

Responding to Ms. Zahn, Chief Mylett said that individuals wanting to get rid of firearms can take them to the police department on a temporary or permanent basis. If permanent, the police department will test the weapons before they are destroyed. In further response to Ms. Zahn, Chief Mylett said the three areas of focus for 2020 are gun safety, sexual assault prevention, and domestic violence. Staff will develop comprehensive public education programs for town hall meetings, safety forums, and other community meetings and events.

Responding to Ms. Zahn, Chief Mylett said the regional approach to gun safety includes monthly meetings of the Eastside Police Chiefs and monthly meetings of all King County law enforcement agencies including the Washington State Patrol, federal partners, King County Prosecutor's Office, and the training facility in Burien.

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis thanked the police department for their work, noting that Bellevue's low crime rate is no accident. He said Bellevue has a well-earned reputation for effective law enforcement.

Responding to Mr. Nieuwenhuis, Chief Mylett said that enhanced background checks take approximately two weeks. They look at an individual's local and national history, whether there are any ERPOs, and other factors. Melissa Chin, Assistant City Attorney/Police Advisor, said an enhanced background check is conducted when there is a transfer of firearms, an application for a concealed pistol license (CPL), and/or when the police department is returning a firearm to an

individual. The enhanced background check includes a criminal history review on the local and national level, discussions with local contacts, a mental health check with the State, and a check for current warrants and active court orders.

Responding to Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis, Chief Mylett described how police officers work to establish rapport with individuals who are subject to an ERPO. In further response, Chief Mylett advised the public that when dealing with an individual considering suicide who possesses a firearm, call 911. The caller should then meet the officers outside when they arrive to allow them to go inside to secure any weapons.

Chief Mylett thanked the Council for their supportive comments and highlighted the important role of human services providers in preventing crime and helping individuals.

Councilmember Robertson noted the City's community building efforts, including the neighborhood mediation program, Diversity Advantage program, and others. She said that connections within the community are good for mental health and allow others to identify a person in crisis or otherwise in need of services. She commended the police department's use of the new ERPO law. Ms. Robertson said she is proud of the police department's efforts. She thanked Chief Mylett for sharing the information with the Council and the public.

Councilmember Lee said it is important to be serious about firearm safety. He said that Bellevue is fortunate to have a safe community due to the efforts of the police department. He commended the department for being proactive in building relationships within the community. He thanked the public for raising the issue of gun safety with the Council. He acknowledged the importance of both law enforcement and human services.

Mayor Robinson thanked the community for raising their concerns with the Council and City staff. She said the City is a regional leader that serves as a model for other cities.

Responding to Ms. Robinson, Chief Mylett said that individuals interested in getting involved with the police department may call him at 425-452-4334 for more information. He said the police department has six citizen advisory councils focused on race, ethnicity, and faith-based efforts.

Mayor Robinson observed that the presentation provided the opportunity to reaffirm the City's commitment to firearm safety.

- Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis moved to approve the proclamation regarding firearm and community safety. Councilmember Robertson seconded the motion.
- The motion carried by a vote of 7-0.

Mayor Robinson read the proclamation regarding firearm violence, overall public safety, proactive policing, and public education outreach in Bellevue.

The meeting was paused briefly at 7:00 p.m. to take photos of the Council and community members.

(b) Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Levy Funding Appropriation

City Manager Miyake recalled that the renewal of the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) levy was approved by the voters in November 2019. The levy package includes funding for the Fire Department's CARES (Citizen Advocates for Referral and Education Services) program and for administrative support for the basic life support (BLS) program.

Fire Chief Jay Hagen said staff is seeking Council direction to add 7.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions in the EMS Division of the Fire Department. He noted that Councilmember Robertson was a voting member of the EMS levy committee, which worked over a two-year period to develop the levy package. He said the City will receive \$1.1 million above the funds received last year. Approximately 20 percent of the Fire Department's budget is supported through the levy. Chief Hagen thanked Battalion Chief Dave Beste and Director of Intergovernmental Relations Joyce Nichols and her staff for their work on the levy.

Chief Hagen said that \$640,000 of the \$1.1 million in new revenue will be used for the CARES mobile integrated health program, and \$461,000 will be used for the BLS program. The levy funds are available immediately for expenditure through 2025. Chief Hagen noted that Bellevue has four Advanced Life Support (ALS) units, two in Bellevue and two in east King County. The EMS Division also manages all medical equipment and supplies, CARES program, liaisons with outside medical stakeholders, and the PEER support program that addresses the mental health needs of first responders.

Natasha Grossman, CARES Program Coordinator, said the program received 529 referrals in 2018 and 618 referrals in 2019. In 2019, 35 percent of the referrals were related to mental health issues. Of those, 10 percent of the individuals were unhoused and 12 percent were experiencing a substance abuse issue. Ms. Grossman said the program receives referrals through the Police Department, Fire Department, Code Compliance program, the City's mediation and conflict resolution services, and Service First staff in City Hall. CARES staff are working with the City's homelessness outreach coordinator to coordinate efforts for best serving the community.

Chief Hagen said that all King County EMS providers were required to adopt ESO software to maintain electronic healthcare records. The use of the software improves data sharing between public safety personnel and hospitals, and allows for data-informed decisions. The Fire Department also implemented Operative IQ software in 2019 for the electronic tracking of EMS supplies, equipment, and medications. The three key advantages of the ESO software are an increased ability to share information with stakeholders, the use of data to make informed decisions benefiting patient outcomes, and assistance in identifying community medical trends (e.g., pandemics, drug overdoses).

Chief Hagen presented a request to add 5.5 FTE positions to the CARES program and two FTE positions to support BLS operations. The CARES positions are a new Master of Social Work-

level Practicum Clinical Coordinator, a MSW-level social worker, and a half-time administrative assistant. Chief Hagen recommended converting the existing three limited-term social worker positions to FTE status.

Battalion Chief Beste described the BLS staffing request for one civilian technology support position and one new firefighter in the EMS Division in an administrative position. Chief Hagen noted that the requested staff positions are revenue-backed by the levy through 2025.

Mayor Robinson thanked Chief Hagen for the presentation and Councilmember Robertson for her work on the EMS levy task force.

Councilmember Robertson noted that the CARES program has a role in the prevention of crime and in providing assistance to individuals experiencing a crisis. She thanked Joyce Nichols, Director of Intergovernmental Relations, and Battalion Chief Beste for their work on the levy package. Ms. Robertson said the levy package will provide better EMS and CARES services throughout King County.

Councilmember Lee thanked Chief Hagen and staff for their work. Responding to Mr. Lee about long-term funding for the new positions, Battalion Chief Beste said the EMS levy has always been approved by the voters and he anticipates that will continue with the next replacement levy. In further response to Mr. Lee, Mr. Beste said the City's Information Technology Department does not have the resources or specific expertise that is needed for the new I.T. position in the EMS Division.

Councilmember Barksdale expressed support for the staffing request.

Councilmember Stokes concurred.

Councilmember Zahn thanked everyone for their work. She is pleased to see the expansion of the CARES program to seven days per week and the use of patient healthcare tracking software to improve the delivery of services.

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis thanked Chief Hagen, Councilmember Robertson, and Ms. Nichols for their work. He commended the CARES program and the enhanced sharing of medical information to help patients.

Mayor Robinson said she is pleased that the staffing additions will not increase the City's budget. She thanked Ms. Grossman and all of the social workers and students who work with the CARES program. Ms. Robinson said their work is important to the community. She expressed support for the staffing proposal.

→ Councilmember Robertson moved to direct staff to prepare an ordinance to appropriate the budget from the EMS levy and to authorize the requested positions in the CARES mobile integrated health unit and Basic Life Support (BLS) program for a total of 7.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions. Councilmember Stokes seconded the motion.

→ The motion carried by a vote of 7-0.

3. Report of the City Manager [*Regular Session Agenda Item 6*]

City Manager Miyake asked staff to provide an update on a recent award received by the City.

Sabra Schneider, Chief Information Officer, said the City won third place in the Digital Cities Awards from the Center for Digital Government. The Digital Survey focuses on the work of cities in the areas of open government, mobility, stakeholder engagement, collaboration initiatives, cybersecurity measures, hiring and retaining competent I.T. staff, broadband connectivity infrastructure, performance measures, disaster recovery, and the use of innovation and best practices.

Ms. Schneider highlighted the City's transition to 100-percent paperless permitting, implementation of the master license agreement (MLA) process for small cell wireless technology, online reporting regarding illegal fireworks, and public wireless service in parks and in King County Housing Authority locations.

Ms. Schneider noted that Councilmembers Lee and Zahn accepted the award on behalf of the City at the National League of Cities (NLC) annual conference in November.

Councilmember Lee said he has been going to the NLC conference over the past 20 years. He noted that Bellevue consistently receives recognition for its leadership, including in the area of technology.

Councilmember Zahn complimented Bellevue's Smart City strategies. Responding to Ms. Zahn, Ms. Schneider said that two areas of focus for 2020 are the data analytics program and robotic process automation. Ms. Zahn suggested that perhaps more can be done with GIS technology in terms of visually understanding the data.

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis congratulated Ms. Schneider and staff on their hard work.

Councilmember Stokes thanked staff for the award and noted that it inspires everyone to keep doing better.

Mayor Robinson asked whether there is an opportunity to implement block chain technology related to licensing or data management. Ms. Schneider said the technology is not quite mature enough for the work handled by government entities. However, she expects that to change rapidly.

Councilmember Barksdale congratulated staff and thanked them for their work.

At 7:47 p.m., Mayor Robinson declared recess to the Regular Session.

Charmaine Arredondo, CMC
City Clerk

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