

*In accordance with Virginia Code § 2.2-3708.2, Virginia Code § 15.2-1413 and the City's Continuity of Government Ordinance adopted on September 15, 2020, and Chapter 1289 of the 2020 Acts of Assembly as amended, I hereby call for a **MEETING BY ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION MEANS** of the Human Rights Commission. This meeting was held by electronic means using the Webex videoconferencing platform because of the COVID-19 Pandemic emergency.*

January 14, 2021
4pm

The purpose of the meeting is to discuss and transact the business of the Commission.

Members Present: Sylvia Nery-Strickland (Chairwoman), Dr. Virginia Jenkot (Vice Chairwoman), Beatriz Amberman, Zakkiyya Anderson, Joe Burnsworth, David Calliott, Thomasine Cubine, Jamal Gunn, Carla Hesseltine, Hannah Mancoll, Emiliano "Jo Jo" Orenca, Luis Rivera, Teresa Stanley, Mark Stevens, Ron Taylor, Frances Knight Thompson, Allison White, Rabbi Israel Zoberman

Staff Present: Stacy Hawks (Human Resources), Regina Hilliard (Human Resources), Dominique McKinnon (HRC Liaison)

Liaisons Present: Councilman Michael Berlucchi, Rod Ingram (Deputy City Attorney), Lieutenant Michelle Meister, Captain Henri Norris, Captain William Zelms

I. Call to Order/Roll Call

The meeting was called to order by Chairwoman Nery-Strickland at 4:02 p.m.

Roll Call of the Commissioners was taken. Commissioner Taylor connected to the meeting after Roll Call was taken. Commissioner Ellis was absent.

Chair Nery-Strickland took a moment to congratulate Employee Relations Manager, Stacy Hawks, on her interview with Channel 13 News regarding the City of Virginia Beach's new employee reporting portal. Stacy reported that the website is where employees can report concerns related to workplace issues, bullying, harassment, and poor treatment. The system is called R.E.S.P.E.C.T. and can be found at www.vbrespect.com or they can call 1-800-869-8522. The system and call center are through Whistleblower Security. Employees can access the site or call 24 hours, 7 days a week to speak with a live person. When a new concern is filed, Stacy receives an email and with the system, the HR department can follow the progress of the case until its completion.

II. Minutes Approval

Vice Chair Jenkot made a motion to approve the minutes from the December 10th meeting. Commissioner Amberman seconded the motion. By a vote of 17-0, the minutes for the December 10th meeting were approved.

III. VBPB Presentation – Recruitment Efforts

Lieutenant Michelle Meister presented an update on the minority officer recruitment efforts of the Virginia Beach Police Department. She reported that the department held three separate meetings with minority officers to gather information on different ways that they can generate more interest and diversity at the recruiting level. They invited 120 minority officers, including African American, Asian, Latino, Pacific Islander and LGBTQ, from various ranks and units. Approximately, 30 of these officers attended the meetings. The meetings were facilitated by the STiR Office and in attendance were higher ranking officers, such as Chief Zucaro and Captain Zelms, to make sure the concerns were heard, and action could be taken on them. The officers were encouraged to participate in candid, open discussion, and asked to identify challenges and provide recommendations for recruiting within minority communities.

During the meetings, they identified internal and external challenges with recruitment, and the officers came up with some great ideas and tasks that can be put in motion to generate more interest in recruits. The most common internal challenges were hazards of the profession and, low pay and benefits. Lack of incentive for officers to participate in recruiting and support to allow participation in recruiting events were challenges stemming from freezes on overtime and short staffing. The most common external challenges were negative perception of the police within minority communities, historical and generational pass-down, lack of positive interactions, and cost of living for potential officers in Virginia Beach.

Some of the recommendations that the officers came up with was encouraging positive interactions between officers and youth through Student Resources Officers (SROs). They also suggested encouraging minority officers to participate in recruitment as well as mentorships for applicants earlier in the selection process. Additionally, they suggested establishing the cadet program to engage younger recruits, utilizing minority officers in scenario-based training, which can be implemented once COVID has subsided, recognizing officers for their community engagement efforts, improving VBPD's public image, and promoting Ride-a-Long program, which can be implemented once COVID has subsided.

Lieutenant Meister reported that in the past two months, the Professional Development and Training department has moved forward with many action items. The department has continued their recruiting taskforce and consortium and they are waiting for approval and funding for the Cadet program. The recruitment team has revamped the application process by realigning the internal workings of the process and as a result, they have seen an increase of people taking the police test by 47%. The department is looking to acquire a new client records management software that will allow them to track and engage applicants through the application process with Q and A sessions, mentorships and workout videos. The department also has a new QR code that goes straight to the application page and has been mounted on 400 police cars. Right now, the department is heavily reliant on technology through WebEx trainings, and they had their 69th recruit academy graduation that was held virtually. In the future, they want to continue that so family members who live out of the area can watch the ceremony.

The department is working to refocus their mindset from recruiting to marketing, marketing the law enforcement profession and the Virginia Beach Police Department. They are looking to acquire a program called Salesforce which will help with target marketing for minority communities. This will open the door for more lower level conversations that can happen quicker, and a large group can be engaged at once.

After the three meetings with the minority officers, they identified 10 participants who proved to be leaders among their peers and had a follow up meeting with them. They all want to be a part of the recruiting and development program and have been engaged in being mentors for new recruits in the

application stage. The department is also look that offering the conditional letter of hire earlier in the application process, after the prior history questionnaire has been submitted and the written test taken, to keep the applicants engaged.

The next step for the department's recruiting efforts was polling the recent graduates from the 69th Academy to identify areas in the recruitment process that need improvement. From this poll, the department found that the new officers felt that the physical fitness test did not indicate what they faced in the Academy. The department is taking steps to get recruits more physically prepared before entering the Academy. The 70th Academy starts January 28th with 42 people who have already been assigned to mentors.

Commissioner Anderson complimented the department on utilizing the QR code to make themselves more accessible and for being current with the times. She asked if there are efforts being made for the department to authentically engage with grassroots or local organizations. Lieutenant Meister stated she has been working with the community for decades, having the hard conversations and turning the lens inward to make vital changes. They continue to work with the HRC, participate with the Pastors/Leaders Community Police Relations Table and the minority recruiting task force with community members. Lieutenant Meister is one of the LGBTQ liaisons for the police department and she works with Hampton Roads Pride as well as the LGBT Consortium. She reported that the VBPD is very effective in the grassroots effort of officers getting out of their vehicles to engage with the community.

Commissioner Stevens asked about the composition for the last class that graduated the Academy and what was the drop-out rate. Lieutenant Meister reported that the class started with 48 people and the academy had a 52% graduation rate – graduating 25 people. This consisted of 1 Asian male, 1 Black male, 2 Black females, 2 Hispanic males, 1 person listed as Other, 16 White males and 2 White females.

Commissioner Stanley commended the department on their on-going work with the Pastors/Leasers Community Police Relations Table in holding community recruiting events, lifting the paid Cadet program and the mentorship. She asked about exit interviews from minority officers to gather data on the culture of policing and is it welcoming to minorities. Lieutenant Meister reported that exit interviews happened between the officers and their commanding officer or Human Resources if they choose. She does not have the details of what the conversations are during those exit interviews, but she can find out. For recruits, they may quit, be removed or be recycled into a future academy. Lieutenant Meister reported that she became the training director of the Professional Training and Development department in August and has had conversations with minority recruits who have decided to leave. One recent Black male recruit, who would have graduated in the 69th Academy class, realized during scenario-based training, that he didn't want to be put in a position to have his personal safety at risk. Scenario-based training is a big eye opener and that is when a lot of recruits realize law enforcement might not be for them. They have two Black female recruits who failed the driving course during the 69th Academy and are now in the fast track recycle for the 70th Academy. They have received training, mentorship and physical agility training to help them be more successful in the 70th Academy. Commissioner Stanley observed that the roles of SROs are becoming more relational and less law enforcement to change to culture of how police are looked at in the community. Lieutenant Meister reported that before schools closed due to COVID, there was a major push to change the mentality and design of the program. The program relies heavily on the interactions and relationships built with the school administration and the students. They have revamped their juvenile perspective and are pulling back on the law enforcement and pulling forward on the relationship building piece.

Commissioner Stanley asked if ideas are coming from the minority officers to reverse the generational stigmas behind joining the police department. Lieutenant Meister suggested engaging in different citizen academies, like the Latino Citizen Academy that has a huge effect and the department learned so much about their views on the police and law enforcement that they have applied to their recruiting. She stated that they have to start with the older generations to regain trust and provide legitimacy that can then trickle down to the younger generations. She also stated that the recruitment of a person, involves their family as well and the department needs to start engaging families in the application process.

Commissioner Burnsworth stated that during his 4 years as a middle school principal at Plaza, because of their SRO, he could count the number of fights in their building on one hand. He credited that to the relationship that the SRO built with the students and the open communication that he built with the students. He stated that there are SROs who have good ideas about relationship building with students from low income and minority communities and the department should tap into that. He asked if the department has considered a police cadet program for credit for students that could recruit, get student interest and build that relationship with the school community. Lieutenant Meister stated that his suggestion can be taken into consideration and reported that the SROs do teach the Virginia Rules program that talks about procedural justice and administrative justice. Lieutenant Meister relayed a story about an SRO who helped a student having difficulties connecting to the school's virtual learning platform and it was resolved without taking any law enforcement actions.

Commissioner Hesseltine asked if the data on the Academy's graduation rate was consistent with other Hampton Roads cities and is the proficiency going up, steady, or going down. Lieutenant Meister reported that that graduation rate is steady historically for Virginia Beach. It is difficult to compare to other areas because their academies are smaller than Virginia Beach and the VBPD has higher level of expectations, such as 960 hours of training in the recruit academy which is double the required amount of training from the Department of Criminal Justice. Commissioner Hesseltine asked if the recruits go on payroll once they enter the Academy. Lieutenant Meister reported that once they are employed by the City, they go on payroll and then receive a pay bump after they graduate and again, after they are certified.

Chair Nery-Strickland asked if any minority officers resigned due to the recent civil unrest. Lieutenant Meister reported that she specifically asked that of the one Black recruit who left the Academy and that was not his reasoning for leaving. That is a topic of conversation with applicants and recruits, but as far as she knows, it was not a driving force for anyone leaving. Chair Nery-Strickland also asked if there was any talk about virtual training for the citizens academies. Lieutenant Meister reported that it is a possibility and a conversation that they can have within the department.

Commissioner Amberman asked if there are career advancement incentive to encourage community engagement for officers. Lieutenant Meister reported that to incentivize officers to become engaged with recruiting in minorities communities, they are looking to offer points towards the professional development program advancement. Levels 1 through 4 have monetary incentives attached to them and they are trying to reestablish overtime and comp time. Commissioner Amberman asked if the department is considering holding social events to interact with the community. Captain Zelms reported that one of the new Chief of Police's biggest strategies is community engagement on the individual neighborhood level. He is looking to roll out some neighborhood liaison officers and neighborhood liaison units so the officers can get to know the residents and people in the community. There are challenges to their community police efforts due to staff shortages, the department has 82 vacancies, but they are still making efforts. They are looking at repurposing their community engagement unit to assist with the community liaison or neighborhood liaison program that they are

going to build. He stated that as they continue to make new progress under Chief Neudigate and learn his vision, they will share more soon.

Councilman Berlucchi asked if Lieutenant Meister could describe the impact the discussion on qualified immunity and implementing a civilian review board with subpoena power and disciplinary authority would have on recruiting and retention efforts. Lieutenant Meister stated that from a recruiting standpoint, removing qualified immunity would have a negative effect on recruiting. She has had families tell her that if qualified immunity is removed, they will not support their children going into the law enforcement profession. She stated that she has not heard any negative feedback on civilian review boards with recruiting. The department is hoping that the people placed on the civilian review board have extensive training in law enforcement policy, procedure and protocols, scenario-based training and legal training. They do believe that the people who are looking to implement the civilian review board do have the community's best interest at heart, as well as the department's and City's. They are hoping that the people placed on the board are of the highest quality, have the character, dedication and the right reason for being on the board.

Student Commissioner Mancoll reported that the SROs are important to have in the schools. They are approachable and you can talk to them or ask them about anything.

IV. Chairman's/Committee/Liaison Reports

Chair Nery-Strickland reported that the Citizens Committee on Boards and Commissions will be sending out a questionnaire for Chairs and Vice Chairs and have asked them to get input from their Commissions and Boards. She stated that there has been no negative feedback from the Chief of Police's report on the incident at Lynnhaven Mall. She thanked Rod Ingram for drafting letters of support for the legislative items recommended by the HRC that were included in City Council's legislative package. She also thanked Councilman Berlucchi for connecting the Commission with Debra Bryan to write the letters. She reported that there was a Joint Oceanfront Committee meeting on the 18th. Staff Liaison McKinnon is working with the RAC's staff liaison to get the minutes. Chair Nery-Strickland suggested that January and February be time for committees to set some goals for their mission.

Commissioner Burnsworth reported that the on-boarding packet has been edited to replace the mention of Ad Hoc with Task Forces, as established during the Retreat. He reported that there was a concern about the language in the packet regarding complaints received by the HRC. He clarified that the document refers to concerns and the Commission needs to stay mindful that we receive community concerns or inquiries that are then passed along to the appropriate body. Staff Liaison McKinnon is making those edits, creating a cover and table of content. The packet will include the by-laws and city code so everything is in one place.

Vice Chair Jenkot reported that she continues to report out the data on COVID-19 in Virginia Beach. Staff Liaison McKinnon published on the Facebook page the link to find out when you are eligible for the vaccine. The Virginia Department of Health gave a presentation during the City Council workshop and City Council is concerned that Virginia Beach is not rolling out the vaccine as fast as some of our neighbors. The Governor's press release stated that Virginia needs to move faster on vaccinations. Commissioner Amberman reported that only 11 of the 66 health departments in Virginia have moved into Phase 1b of vaccinations. Each jurisdiction is doing things in different way and have different resources, and that is why they all aren't in sync. There are 3 phases:

Phase 1a — healthcare workers and people in long term facilities

Phase 1b – frontline essential workers, people age 75+, people in correctional facilities, people in homeless shelters and migrant camps

Phase 1c – includes all other residents

Virginia Beach will be in phase 1a until the end of the month. She recommended asking a representative of the health department to make a presentation to the HRC and maybe there is a way for the Commission to support their efforts to get more members of the community vaccinated faster. There are some websites that are available for people to register for the vaccine, but there are concerns that not everyone has access to computers and there needs to be different ways for people to register. There is a phone number that people can call as well. These websites will have vaccination information in different languages. She also reported that over 11,000 providers that have applied to dispense vaccines and the Commonwealth of Virginia has partnered with 150 community independent and chain pharmacies.

Commissioner Hesseltine reported that the Law Enforcement Oversight Committee met on December 16th. She will be sending out the response from the VBPD regarding questions that were compiled about the Use of Force policy. The committee will be discussing the response from the VBPD during the next meeting on the 19th and then the committee will circle back to finalize the discussion with the department. Staff Liaison McKinnon reported that she sent out the link for the meeting on the 19th that will be at 2:30pm.

Commissioner Stevens reported on the BEACH meeting and their discussion on winter shelter, which was suspended due to COVID-19. Virginia Beach secured 83 hotels and picked up another 35 recently and with PIN Ministries, is moving the homeless into these hotel rooms. They are also providing them food. He reported that he is not seeing a lot of people on the Oceanfront so their efforts are working, hopefully they will be able to move them into permanent shelter from there. The City will be hiring two experts to work with the homeless who will report to the housing resource center and he will be having a meeting with the City Manager to clarify what they will be doing. Commissioner Stanley reported that there is funding for rent support and eviction protection has been extended to January. She has asked for information that can be distributed to the community about the rent support and BEACH stated that they would get that to her and Mark when it is available.

Commissioner Cubine reported for the Mental Health Taskforce that the Governor has put the 30.2 million dollars for STEP-VA back into the budget. The taskforce had a meeting on December 14th that was attended by a representative from Human Services, NAMI and Andrea Bryk with the police department. They reviewed their major concerns:

- To ensure that Virginia has a comprehensive mental health system of care – Virginia is still 41st in the country for access to mental health care
- Elimination of stigma
- Increase support and advocacy for mental health funding and services – the taskforce wants to work with faith communities on this effort, but they want to do this in-person rather than virtually
- Housing – NAMI has been receiving a lot of calls from families of people who have mental issues that are homeless

She reported that the taskforce discussed creating a video about mental health issues and resources. The taskforce will contact people who signed up to volunteer at the mental health forum and ask them to contact their legislators. Shelby Giles will be gathering information from the housing support services about what is available and what are the needs for people with mental health issues. The next meeting will be January 27th.

Commissioner Stanley reported Commissioner Ellis and Commissioner Mancoll are joining the season for non-violence collective. They will be meeting on January 18th in partnership with NAMI and the ViBe district. The focus will be on mental health, anxiety and depression.

Commissioner Zoberman stated that with the recent events in Washington D.C., we must educate ourselves on the basics of American democracy and we have a lot of work to do.

V. Staff Report and Updates

Staff Liaison McKinnon reminded the Commissioners that the City Clerk's Office has sent out the Annual Financial Disclosure Statement and it is due on Monday, February 1st. She reported that Terri Chelius with the City Clerk will be sending out reminders periodically. Staff Liaison McKinnon will forward the email from Terri Chelius for those who may not have received the original message.

VI. Adjournment

Chair Nery-Strickland adjourned the meeting at 6:03pm.

Next Meeting:
Thursday, February 11, 2021 @ 4:00 p.m.
Virtual Meeting