

Regular Public Safety Advisory Committee Meeting Civic Center, 2 Park Drive South,
Gibson Room 212, Great Falls, MT 59401

CALL TO ORDER: PSAC Chair Sandra Guynn called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

ROLL CALL: Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC) Members present: Jeni Dodd, Sandra Guynn, Wendy McKamey, Joe McKenney, George Nikolakakos, Mike Parcel, Thad Reiste, Tony Rosales (participated telephonically), and Shannon Wilson.

Absent: PSAC Member Aaron Weissman.

1. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

PSAC Chair Guynn moved, seconded by PSAC Member Wilson, that the PSAC accept the Minutes of the May 1, 2024, PSAC Meeting as presented.

PSAC Chair Guynn asked if there were any comments from the public or discussion amongst the Committee. Hearing none, PSAC Chair Guynn called for the vote.

Motion carried – 9-0.

EDUCATIONAL PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

2. FOLLOW UP PRESENTATIONS FROM MUNICIPAL COURT AND LEGAL

City Attorney David Dennis reviewed a handout setting forth crime rates by county. Cascade County has the highest crime rates over the counties of Flathead, Gallatin, Missoula, Lewis and Clark, and Yellowstone of 1100 cases per 10,000 people.

PSAC Chair Guynn received clarification that the pretrial services component of the approved County Safety Levy only benefitted Cascade County cases.

City Attorney Dennis reported that when the State court system was upgraded to a full court enterprise system, his office no longer had access to that case management system that his office had relied on. Great Falls is the only City Attorney Office in Montana that does not have a case management system. Although his office recently regained access to the State’s full court system, it would be more helpful in a lot of ways for the City Prosecutors to have their own platform. Currently, there is no way to track and sort information.

PSAC Member Reiste reported that he sat in Municipal Court two mornings and witnessed an amazing amount of work being processed without the needed software tools. It is only going to get more overwhelming as the workload and community grows. PSAC Member Wilson concurred.

PSAC Member McKenney addressed what the City means when talking about “growth” and the challenge with funding public safety. Over the last few decades, the City’s footprint has grown

approximately forty percent. In the early 1970's, a public safety bond was approved for the Fire Department. Four fire stations were built to meet the public safety needs at that time based on the footprint of the City. Also around that time, the City employed approximately 100 firefighters. Now, Great Falls Fire Rescue has approximately 70 firefighters and the City's footprint has grown since that time. The Fire Department has a national standard of a four minute response time. The Fire Department cannot meet that four minute standard on average, which means it affects life safety and property, but also insurance rates go up.

Even if the footprint of the City hasn't grown, it would still be a public safety issue because the City went from 100 firefighters down to 70. Another fire standard is having 15 firefighters on a house fire to manage it properly. Great Falls has 13 firefighters citywide on staff, three in each station and one supervisor.

It has been a 25-year challenge. In the late 1990's, one of the ways that the State Legislature wanted to solve the increase in property taxes was to cap it. It was capped at half the rate of inflation. Imagine being in business for yourself for the past 25 years and not being able to keep up with inflation. So, even without growth, we would be having this decline of being able to properly fund public safety.

City Manager Greg Doyon added that the City's coverage area has expanded. Beyond that, there are things that society faces that impact how public safety services are provided. What he has seen since he has been a City Manager in Great Falls is the scope, frequency, severity, nature, and complexity of services have changed significantly for everyone in public safety. A specific example is in the 1970's marijuana was the drug of choice. Now, it is fentanyl, which affects all EMS first responders, the Great Falls Police Department and Great Falls Fire Rescue.

Another impact is travel and tourism. The City has become a little bit of a destination or at least a stopping point to go to either of the National Parks. There has been a lot of promotion to bring people here. So, we are not just talking about serving our own residents.

Another impact is the infusion of temporary workers in the City. There was more police engagement and court activity with the influx of Calumet's temporary workers coming in from out of state.

There is also a homeless population that typically requires emergency services. There is also the transient population that comes to Great Falls for services. The availability of mental health resources has changed over the years that impacts how a first responder has to deal with somebody that has a mental health issue. First responders do not have the resources to provide to them.

In 2017 the Criminal Justice Reinvestment Act definitely had an impact on courts and law enforcement.

Safety standards for first responders have also changed. There are certifications, licensures, and other things that they have to do that have changed their procedure and how they engage and provide those services.

3. PRESENTATION FROM POLICE

Police Chief Jeff Newton, Great Falls Police Department (GFPD), reviewed and discussed the PowerPoint slides attached to the agenda packet. He reported that this presentation is a refresher of what GFPD was asking for in the levy and an emphasis on the challenges GFPD is experiencing right now as a law enforcement agency serving the community, and some concerns and where he thinks the City is headed. He elaborated as follows:

- GFPD has worked diligently to streamline processes and is running about as lean as it can.
- The Patrol and Investigation Bureaus are prioritizing calls.
- A Toggle report that was conducted for a three-month timeframe revealed that officers on patrol have about one hour of undedicated time during their 10 hour and 40 minute shifts. The one hour undedicated time is not continuous and is in small increments of 5 to 15 minutes. That means it reduces their ability to proactively enforce traffic stops, to respond to complaints, and it decreases high visibility patrols, fewer community and business checks, and all those things that are important to the community.
- Investigations Bureau is focusing on violent crimes and sex offenses. They even have to prioritize those offenses. The property crimes get pushed to the bottom of the pile.
- Many programs have been eliminated, including some community based programs. Staffing and resources have been put into their core functions of patrol and investigations.
- Alternative funding sources have been sought through grants. The Great Falls Police Community Foundation has been a phenomenal supporter of GFPD, which is made up of donations from the community through fundraisers to supplement budget shortfalls for needed equipment and training for officers. The Downtown Association has also helped.
- The Great Falls Police Protective Association has funded things within the Police Department and has also donated their time for events in the community.
- GFPD is currently down nine officers and down seven dispatchers. He is currently going through a hiring cycle. He is hoping to hire two lateral officers, meaning they have previous law enforcement experience and, if they are from Montana, he doesn't have to send them back through a 12-week academy. They can do initial training, and then a 14-week field training officer program.
- Data is being used to deploy resources. For example, if an area is saturated with vehicle break-ins, they will saturate that area with additional officers.
- As of Tuesday this week, GFPD averaged 114 calls for service per day, and averaged 14 officers during a 24-hour timeframe. As the weather is changing, calls for service will increase substantially. During the heat of last summer, GFPD was running anywhere from 160 to 200 calls for service per day with the same staffing levels.
- Some of the complexities of how things have changed in law enforcement include, for example, processing a DUI. Because of legislative changes, defense work, reporting requirements, etc., the average DUI investigation takes 2.25 to 3.5 hours. Because the breath test analysis instrument has been questioned, GFPD now does blood draws which adds time for search warrants. If it's a blood draw issue, or if the individual is over a 3.0 blood alcohol content (BAC), the officers have to take them to the hospital to get cleared medically before they can be incarcerated. That may add another two hours.

A DUI investigation takes a minimum of two officers. If he has seven on a squad, and just lost two for several hours, he is down to five officers. Partner Family Member Assault (PMFA) domestic violence calls take a minimum of two officers. Now he is down to three officers. If a shoplifting call comes in, he is down another officer for 45 minutes. Hopefully a major crash doesn't occur. A crash that is blocking or is an injury accident may take multiple officers to include assistance from outside agencies for public safety. The times mentioned do not include writing reports, evidence submission, and then subsequent court attendance.

- Forcible felonies consisting of aggravated assault, robbery and rape cases are starting to increase.
- The Investigations Bureau has seen a 6% increase in violent crimes, and the Special Victims Unit has seen a 6% increase in sex crimes or offenses against children. One investigator solely investigated 60 Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC)/Human Trafficking cases in 2023.
- Four school resource officers (SRO) were assigned 437 cases. The Diversion Program is running about 90%-92%. That means the SRO's work closely with the school administration. When a juvenile commits a low level offense, the SRO works with the school administration for in-house discipline, punishment, and resources to try to keep them out of the juvenile justice system. Without the diversion program, the SRO cases would be increased exponentially.
- In 2023, the Narcotics unit saw a 141% increase in fentanyl seizures and 198% increase in cocaine seizures. There was a 66% decrease in methamphetamine seizures. That does not mean that meth isn't prevalent because the more current numbers are eye popping and it is coming back in droves. It means officers are focusing their attention on the fentanyl issue. There was also a 161% increase in clandestine marijuana lab seizures.
- There have been 39 overdoses, three of which were fatal, so far in 2024. Eighteen times officers have deployed Naloxone or Narcan to reverse the effects of opioid overdoses.
- Assaults on officers has increased by 21% over the last year.

Chief Newton reported his concerns include:

- Staffing levels of both sworn officers and at the 911 Center – recruitment and retention and career vs job. The disturbing part about that is it is tremendously expensive and takes about 371 days to get an officer from the recruitment process of hiring until they are solo patrol out of field training. It takes about 120 days just to do the hiring process.
- Level of aggression/violence is increasing with community members.
- Significant increase in narcotics in our community.
- Injuries to officers.
- Prioritization of calls – both at patrol and investigations. GFPD wants to respond to the community's concerns, but simply cannot do it with the resources and capacity that it has.
- Budgets/resources – costs continue to increase and are passed on to the GFPD. Equipment, software and warranties are more expensive.
- Legislative – changes in the legal landscape, and unfunded mandates. Manager Doyon mentioned the 2017 legislative changes. He thinks one of the reasons shoplifting has skyrocketed is because, if it is a first offense misdemeanor theft, people get a ticket rather

than jail time. Somebody could steal \$1,499 worth of items, and GFPD has to write them a ticket and let them go. The legislative changes that took people out of the Department of Corrections and back into community based programs created more work for law enforcement, EMS, and the court system. For example, last year the officer involved shootings and the homicides that occurred, with one exception of the tragic homicide/suicide on West Hill Drive, involved individuals either on probation or parole. That is a reflection of those individuals being pushed from the Department of Corrections down to the overworked Probation and Parole Officers. There is a cascading effect with all of that.

Looking into the future, workloads are not decreasing. Calls for service were 5% higher in 2023 than they were in 2022, and staffing levels are not increasing. GFPD continues to streamline processes that are allowable by law and by policies. Manager Doyon spoke about some of the issues GFPD had with the individuals Calumet brought in. The Sentinel project is still pending and is going to be a significant influx of individuals in our community.

Great Falls is a hub in Northcentral Montana. A significant amount of individuals and communities outside Great Falls use Great Falls. GFPD and all public service agencies are providing service to those individuals.

In summary, GFPD is looking critically about how it recruits and retains, has streamlined as much as it can, has changed shifts at the dispatch center and patrol bureau to maximize staffing during peak call loads, is prioritizing cases, and streamlining the crash reporting process.

PSAC Member Reiste received clarification that GFPD's ask of about \$4.5 million of the total levy was to be distributed over a four to five year timeframe as staffing levels increased.

PSAC Member Dodd was referred to Cascade County Sheriff Jesse Slaughter to answer her question about what the Cascade County Sheriff's levy does for her.

PSAC Member Wilson asked about a program for "frequent flyers."

Chief Newton explained that five or six years ago a program was started that included the Sheriff's Office. It required a group of investigators full-time focus to research those individuals. It ultimately came down to lack of staffing and became unmanageable.

He also noted that the GFPD isn't involved in certain programs like it was in past years because it comes down to staffing and prioritizing.

PSAC Member Dodd received clarification that the \$1,499 limit on a first offense theft was a legislative change.

PSAC Member McKenney received clarification that the statistics set forth on slide 7 regarding 2024 overdoses pertain only to GFPD. If GFFR, EMS and emergency rooms were included that number would be significantly higher. He added that there are overdoses occurring in the City that they don't know about because some individuals that are using opioids carry Narcan themselves.

They Narcan their partners to revive them. Through interviews and through investigations, they know that is occurring quite frequently.

PSAC Member Nikolakakos commented that what he is hearing is GFPD needs personnel, man hours, and boots on the ground. What would the consequences be of waking up tomorrow, for example, and having five percent less budget. What would citizens lose immediately.

Chief Newton responded that more individuals would be forced into on-line reporting to free up officers. He would look critically at cutting other programs. The only cuts after that are personnel, which is counterintuitive to what we are talking about today. It comes down to the communication and education aspects, and providing the best service. It would basically put GFPD back about 20 years. The community expects to have information, the community expects GFPD to be involved in other activities, and the community expects some of these programs.

PSAC Member McKamey inquired about the unfunded mandates. Chief Newton provided several examples of Legislative unfunded mandates since 2016. He will provide the committee a list of unfunded State mandates.

PSAC Member Reiste noted that it would appear that on a regular basis one to two officers are in Court dealing with issues and are not on the street responding, or the officers are coming off their night shift and are sitting in Court all morning for potentially someone that isn't even going to show up in Court. This is hard on the officers and their families and the Department, but it's also hard on the community because of the overtime pay.

PSAC Member McKamey inquired the average time that GFPD has a new hire, noting that it takes a lot of money for training and equipment to go along with the personnel.

Chief Newton responded that the last four that resigned had between five to nine years with the Great Falls Police Department.

PSAC Member Dodd commented that if the State is making these mandates, perhaps the PSAC should figure out how the State would be paying for those and reimbursing GFPD.

PSAC Member Rosales inquired how the compensation packages have changed relative to inflation, and how does the salary and benefit package compare to other careers in law enforcement.

Chief Newton responded that GFPD's compensation package is comparable to other cities in the state of Montana. When looking at benefit packages, you also have to look at the cost of living in those respective areas. With regard to inflation, they look at the cost of the CPI and GFPD is in the ballpark.

PSAC Chair Guynn noted that mental health is playing an important role in what has been going on and the challenges that we have. She inquired the arrangement with Many Rivers Health.

Chief Newton commented that GFFD partnered with Alluvion for a Crisis Intervention Training grant for a Mobile Response Team (MRT), because there are calls from a lot of people in crisis, or dealing with mental health related issues. There are individuals that are more trained and more qualified to deal with these individuals in crisis and get them the resources they needed. Alluvion backed out of that program because of staffing. Also because of staffing, Many Rivers Health chose not to engage. Likely, GFFD is going to have to return about \$70,000 of that grant money. GFFD is back to responding to mental health complaints, which is what they were trying to alleviate. While the MRT was running, it was a successful program.

4. PRESENTATION FROM GREAT FALLS FIRE RESCUE (GFFR)

Deputy Chief EMS Jeremy Virts and Fire Marshal Mike McIntosh reviewed and discussed the PowerPoint slides attached to the agenda packet. Additional discussion included:

- GFFR builds community partnerships to maximize their services delivered to the City.
- GFFR provides delivery of emergency response for advanced life support (ALS) and basic life support (BLS) emergencies.
- The private EMS industry has a harder time providing those services due to retention of employees, and geographically the private agency deploys resources out of one station.
- Across the nation paramedics have been imbedded in fire departments and have had to learn how to treat more complex patients.
- The 39 overdoses Chief Newton discussed required two officers, a fire engine with three staff and an ambulance with two staff.
- The nuts and bolts behind fire prevention services is learning about fire science for more complex problems.
- GFFR equipment gets used 365 days per year. There is a lot of wear and tear on the equipment and it has a service life. Equipment replacement is an ongoing problem.
- The burden of mental health crises falls mostly on the GFFD. GFFR performs preliminary investigations. If the patient doesn't belong in the emergency room, GFFD goes from law enforcement to caregiver at that point.
- GFFR will always have to deal with recognizing and combatting workforce mental stress.
- The fire training facility is old and antiquated to the point that GFFR cannot use the hose tower. The hose tower was a vital part of training because Great Falls has multi-story buildings. They have had to adapt to utilizing the parking garage for training.
- Mutual aid partners, Malmstrom Air Force Base (MAFB) and Montana Air National Guard (MANG), are consistently requested to backfill stations. The problem is that MAFB and MANG have their own missions and areas to fulfill too. If the deployment numbers are heavy at MAFB, GFFR may not get a resource from them.
- GFFR prioritizes calls they go on, and no longer goes to non-emergency incidents. A large number of those non-emergent medical calls resulted in a transport by the private ambulance company.
- There were 3942 overlapping incidents last year, which means two or more resources on a call at one time.

- The national standard is sending 15 firefighters to a structure fire. If GFFR has overlapping resources on calls, there will not be anywhere near 15 firefighters on one structure call, probably more like six. That puts firefighters in danger, causes physical exertion, and exposure to other structures.

In response to PSAC Member Reiste's inquiry, Deputy Chief Virts will provide data from the State reporting system pertaining to the number of EMS calls that are drug related.

PSAC Member Wilson inquired how GFFR deals with "frequent flyers."

Deputy Chief Virts explained that GFFR can't interpret frequent utilizer's perception of an emergency. Sometimes they have no other resources to help. That is why they keep calling. He personally contacts frequent utilizers of the 911 system to determine what it is GFFR can help them with.

PSAC Member Dodd inquired if EMS response was shared with the private company.

Deputy Chief Virts responded that the private company has one location. Geographically, GFFR has four fire stations. So, it is a co-response with the private company. GFFR are first responders with ALS capabilities. GFFR typically gets to the emergent calls first to initiate care. GFFR does not go to the non-emergency calls unless requested. There is an EMS performance contract between the City and the private ambulance service company.

Deputy Chief Virts also discussed the increased need for housing availability.

PSAC Member McKenney asked Deputy Chief Virts to explain the term "abandonment."

Deputy Chief Virts responded that GFFR personnel has a moral, ethical, and legal obligation when they respond and make contact with a patient as emergency care providers. Their license demands that they stay there until the patient is handed off to somebody of equal or higher training or certification. If something is burning across town, their obligation is to that patient at that time, legally and ethically.

Fire Marshal Mike McIntosh reported that less fires within the city contributed to modern building techniques, fire prevention efforts, education, and code enforcement. Taking a stronger stance on code compliance means preventative measures to limit the possibility of fires. GFFR is proactive by taking added safety measures for public safety events so that people can come to Great Falls and enjoy the city and be safe while they are here doing it. There are also added safety requirements for commercial construction.

Since Covid and due to overtime expenses, one of the programs that had to be cut was fire prevention education in the school system.

To lessen the amount of false alarm calls, GFFR can charge for their response after three false alarm calls. It not only lessened false alarm calls, but allowed for GFFR to work with business owners to fix issues with their life safety systems that they did not know existed.

They are also working on implementation of risk reduction technologies within the community. They are engaging the community to provide information to GFFR through a program called "Community Connect." Homeowners can sign up to provide information about their house and the people that reside there. That key information will pop up on the dashboard of the responding engine companies.

Fire Marshal McIntosh also reported that GFFR is a huge player in the development in this community. They work with the Planning and Community Development Department and the Engineering Department when it comes to the growth of the City. The City's geographical boundaries are expanding. With that expansion, GFFR can't meet the national standard response time of four minutes.

The State Legislature hampered municipalities by making it illegal for fire departments to require or even offer home sprinklers for fire suppression to help with development costs. The next Legislative session could drastically impact local jurisdiction's availability to strengthen the codes and fire prevention efforts within the community. There was a recent study about the need for housing and affordable housing for the next 10 years in our community. At the State level they are kicking around a lot of ideas on how to increase housing by lessening codes and standards that are put in place to protect people within the communities.

With the cost of housing going up, property taxes are going up. The ISO rating has a direct impact on homeowners' insurance rates. Great Falls ISO rating went from a two to a three.

In 2023, his division had confirmed arson cases. He worked directly with GFPD detectives to investigate. Those cases are still sitting on a backlog because of the amount of more important cases GFPD has within the community, such as violent crimes.

GFFR has cut basically everything that it can, including services.

PSAC Member Reiste inquired how many positions GFFR has open that are funded.

Fire Marshal McIntosh responded that GFFR is full, with the caveat that two employees are off with major injuries and another two employees will be off to care for major injuries. GFFR was down four staff members during the Covid pandemic and it drove overtime numbers up. People got burnt out on the number of call backs.

PSAC Member Reiste inquired what GFFR's ask was.

Fire Marshal McIntosh responded that the bond ask was to build a fire station and equip that fire station. The mill levy ask was for 33 personnel, inclusive of staff for that new fire station and one position within the Fire Prevention Bureau.

PSAC Member Reiste also received clarification from Police Chief Newton that he currently has nine vacancies that are funded. He also has four personnel on light duty due to injuries or medical reasons. So, technically, GFPD is down 13. GFPD's ask was for 24.

Fire Marshal McIntosh concluded that GFFR is having a hard time recruiting people to come into the public safety sector.

5. PUBLIC SURVEY/POLL

Due to a lack of time, this item will be added to a future agenda.

6. FUTURE AGENDA SUGGESTIONS

Request from PSAC Member Rosales to discuss Great Falls economic past.

After a brief discussion, Manager Doyon will conduct a high level review of those two historical documents, and he and PSAC Member Rosales will provide a brief overview at the next meeting.

The June 5th agenda will also include hearing from Finance about how the City is funded, and from City staff about TIF's and tax abatements.

Topics for future meetings can be emailed to PSAC Chair Guynn.

MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM COMMITTEE

None.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Public Safety Advisory Committee, PSAC Member Parcel moved, seconded by PSAC Member Wilson, to adjourn the regular meeting of May 15, 2024, at 8:12 p.m.

Motion carried 9-0.

Chairperson Sandra Guynn

Acting Secretary – City Clerk Lisa Kunz

Minutes Approved: June 5, 2024

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