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Sent: Wednesday, March 17, 2021 5:01:39 PM
To: Tom Bailer <CouncilSeatA@cityofcordova.net>; Cathy Sherman <councilseatb@cityofcordova.net>; Jeff Guard <councilseatc@cityofcordova.net>; Melina Meyer <councilseatd@cityofcordova.net>; Anne Schaefer <councilseate@cityofcordova.net>; David Allison <councilseatf@cityofcordova.net>; David Glasen <councilseatg@cityofcordova.net>
Cc: Clay Koplin <mayor@cityofcordova.net>
Subject: Council Packet Memo 3/17/21

Ladies and gentlemen,

Please take a few moments to look at the (sorry) rather lengthy letter concerning pages 69-70 of tonight's council packet and the information concerning SB1 and SB3.

I have stayed away from all the Facebook comments and think this is a more appropriate way to share my thoughts privately.

I've been in this business a very long time. As I mentioned several times when I was helping with the IMT.....

Don't take everything you hear for granted. Track every rumor or complaint to the source.

If I can ever be off assistance, please don't hesitate.

Again, Thank you for your time and all that you contribute as volunteers to our community.

Mike.

907-253-5896

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to provide you some feedback concerning pages 69 and 70 of the council packet pertaining to the Police Department.

First, I would like to mention that this memo is in the packet inappropriately. Yes, 2 or more members may add something to the agenda, but that does not necessarily mean it should be added to the agenda.

If constituents bring concerns or complaints to a council member would it not be more appropriate to pass them on to (your employee) the City Manager who would in turn pass them on to (her employee) the appropriate department head to find out whether they are valid? This should be done out of professional courtesy and common decency.

My view of this whole thing is that it is turning into a witch hunt directed at the police department by a few individuals. Yes, mistakes have been made. People learned from them. How can you expect anyone to concentrate on their job and be effective when they are continually be picked a part by a few individuals that are trying to push an agenda? This needs to end now. It will destroy your police department. I have seen it firsthand. In 2007 three officers including myself resigned from the department in a little over a month and a half due to mismanagement.

Have any of you bothered to take the time to go down there and ask the Chief to show you around? I know no one did in the last six years I was there. The department is neat, clean, organized, and the staff is well trained. They take care of the cities equipment and are always trying to improve. Even with limited resources, they are doing a good job. They run an efficient operation. The recent Heroin and Meth arrests are proof of that.

Did any of you bother to take the time to tell them they did a good job taking over \$20k in Heroin and Meth off the streets using the drug dog we worked so hard to get in the past 5 years. (Which was purchased by money from NVE and the state by the way). If you did, then great. If you did not, maybe you should.

These cases do not happen overnight. Sometimes they take years to develop. Sometimes the public has a hard time understanding that and not surprisingly the ones that are complaining the loudest are the ones that do not pass it on to law enforcement for various reasons.

- Reports of on-duty officers singling out individuals and harassing them.

In all my years working in Cordova I have NEVER received a valid report of an officer on or off duty singling out an individual and harassing them. There have been instances where members of the public who repeatedly violate city code, state or federal law receive multiple citations for repeatedly violating the law. This usually comes after one or more verbal warnings for the offense.

Examples of these are things such as snow removal parking violations. It was my practice when I was there that during the first few snowfalls the officer would call in license plates to dispatch who would in turn notify the owner to move their vehicle. The problem was solved most of the time.

However, folks that choose to ignore our warning often receive a parking citation which usually gets their attention. If they continue to impede snow removal, they may receive more citations which some consider as harassment. I suppose that if we really wanted to harass them, we could have their vehicle towed.

Other circumstances are dogs attacking other dogs and people. These are more serious of course, but sometimes they are settled with little more than an apology and someone paying the vet bill. However, we have had repeat offenders that have been cited and have had to put their dogs down rather than take the chance of having the dog attack a person, especially a child. There are those that consider this harassment too.

And of course, there are those who refuse to put their dog on a leash, allow it to run in traffic, chase people, etc. and usually after repeated warnings they will receive citations as well. Harassment? I think not. They are just doing their job.

Our officers try to maintain a consistent and fair approach to their duties.

- Facility is not welcome to the public.

Employee safety and security at the Police Department has been a serious concern for many years.

When the city offices moved to the Cordova Center, we budgeted \$20K to move the dispatch center upstairs. (We completed the project \$4K under budget by doing a lot of the work ourselves).

The location is much safer for the staff and provided a restroom facility and sink area within the office and the space was larger which would allow for multiple dispatch positions in the event of larger emergencies. This was also better than having facilities down the hall away from the emergency lines. This move was done for staff safety.

Over the years our dispatchers have had people pull guns on them in the lobby. (Ask Paul Trumblee, this happened to his mom). We also had a prisoner attempt to escape. I was off duty at the time and tackled him in front of the dispatch door still inside the facility. The Police Chief and Fire Marshal's offices were also moved upstairs at little expense. Had we left dispatch where it was, it would have cost over \$20K for bullet proof glass and wall panels alone.

We were also able to move the DMV office back into the Public Safety facility. We had previously been paying \$12K to rent another facility. So, this was a huge cost savings to

the city. In addition, the city left no money to heat the building, so we were able to work out a deal to rent the space vacated by city staff to the Alaska State Troopers. They pay the city \$30K in rent annually.

The staff has been working on upgrades to accommodate the public, but as you know these things take time and money. Since covid hit, we were able to capture some of those funds and upgraded access security and there are plans to install an upgraded intercom system to make the place more user friendly. Some painting and lobby furniture upgrades are also planned.

Cordova is not alone in allowing limited access to its facilities. Most places including city hall and CCMC have recordings that you must listen to before you can speak to a live person. CCMC doors are locked after 5 p.m. and you must be buzzed into the emergency room after hours. This is for staff safety.

The PD staff always tries to be accommodating but sometimes they are dealing with other things. One Officer, and one dispatcher may be handling multiple calls for both Cordova and Whittier, prisoners, and so on. To be more welcoming means hiring more staff.

- Officers are not visible and do not get out into the public.

They are out there. It is hard to be visible when there is only 1 officer per shift and almost half of the day shift officers time is spent going to and from, or at the airport. Pre-covid, officers did routine bar checks several times per shift, ate lunch at school with the kids when we had more officers, attended sporting events while on patrol, provided presentations in our schools, etc. I personally taught Active Shooter Response training each year from 2014 on. This training was provided by one guy, for grade K-12 at our schools, CCMC, Ilanka, NVE, TSA, Alaska Airlines and several more.

We identified the problem of having only one trainer a while ago and this past year we received a grant to provide training for additional trainers. That training is scheduled in a week or so.

Their rules of engagement changed from proactive to reactive due to covid as well. DPS guidelines suggest less interaction with the public to protect staff. I am really pleased that we have been able to protect our police, fire, and EMS responders from contracting covid.

- Reports of on-duty officers not wearing masks when interacting with individuals.

True in some cases. Again, this goes to new procedures to follow during covid. Officers do not wear their masks when close interaction and clear directions to people are given. Facial expression is important.

- Council mandates and rules not followed.

Not sure what you mean by this. If you are referring to the public, they generally were/are following them. We received very few substantiated reports and often the reports were relayed to the department hours, even days later which carry little weight from an enforcement purview.

- Accountability, oversight, and integrity.

The PD already must comply with annual audits and inspections by the state for the jail, Alaska Public Safety Information Network (APSIN), Alaska Mobile Radio (ALMR), and others. Part of the ALMR audit includes physical accountability for every single police, fire, and EMS radio, fixed based, mobile, and portable. That is hundreds of radios folks.

I have attached rough copies of Senate Bill 1 and Senate Bill 3 to this email. The federal and State governments, as well as the Alaska Police Standards Council (APSC) are making various changes to the way police officers and departments do business. Thankfully, our state has not taken a knee jerk reaction to these discussions like so many other state and local governments who are now regretting it. Several places that defunded and made drastic changes are now trying to pour millions of dollars back into their police efforts but are getting few officers that want to come back.

All of this is being added to the mounting requirements our officers must abide by. My suggestion is to wait and see what happens at the federal and state levels. Our law enforcement folks will have to be retrained in many areas and will have to receive new training to keep up with the ever-changing landscape of their jobs.

- Responsiveness to Police Survey feedback.

Chief Taylor and Helen are working on this. (I believe).

- Turning all complaints and lapses in judgment into opportunities for improvement.

The department has always done this. People make mistakes and we always tried to learn from them. Sometimes one on one, and sometimes through department wide training.

To sum up, Cordova's police department does not have the problems or need a culture change like many in the lower 48. Please stop trying to make it one. Take care of your people, and your departments. Even the most loyal dogs are only loyal to a point. The same can be said for people. I am always available if anyone has any questions or if I can be of help to you. Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Mike Hicks