

Citizens and Police Community Relations Advisory Committee
Monday, March 28, 2022 6:00 p.m.
Fuego Church
2039 E. State Road 60, Lake Wales

CALL TO ORDER:

Lt. Michael Smith	PRESENT
Andy Oguntola	PRESENT
Dwight Wilson	PRESEBT
Al Goldstein	PRESENT
Narvell Peterson	PERSENT
Tiffany Davis	PRESENT

POLICE TRAFFIC ACTIVITY

Lt. Smith reported on the police activity during the month of March:

Alpha 435 reports
Bravo 468 reports
Charlie 576 reports
Delta 338 reports
Total calls with firearms: 10
Total calls for service: 1,800
Total arrests: 70

Lt. Smith advised the City is divided into four sectors, and he identified the area of each sector. Alpha Sector is from Central Avenue to Scenic Highway and north up to Mt. Lake Cut Off Road. Bravo Sector is Central to Scenic up Burns Avenue and all the subdivisions along Burns Avenue. Charlie Sector is everything from Central Avenue to Scenic Highway back to this area. Delta Sector is everything north of Mt. Lake Cut Off Road.

Lt. Smith stated one of the biggest complaint around the City is traffic as is in the nation. Lt. Smith reported on the traffic statistics for the City for the month of March

Traffic complaints: 35
Traffic stops: 187
Traffic crashes: 88
Traffic citations: 172
Traffic warnings: 13

Lt. Smith mentioned that a traffic detail, which is a directed patrol, was conducted during this month in the Delta area. There were four citations written in this area, and five citations were written in Lake Ashton, which is in the Delta area. Traffic details are conducted during the time that the officers are not running calls for service.

Andy Oguntola asked Lt. Smith to break down how much of the money from citations actually goes to the Lake Wales Police Department.

Lt. Smith advised that the agency alone receives pennies on the dollar from citations. At the lowest of a traffic citation of \$164.00, the majority of that money goes to the State to different programs such as education and programs such as that. The City itself receives about \$4.00 or \$5.00. Lt. Smith added that citations are not a revenue generator for us, for we simply enforce traffic laws in an effort to reduce traffic crashes. The biggest reason for traffic enforcement is safety for our citizens.

Narvell Peterson mentioned he appreciates the traffic light that was placed at Mt. Lake Cut Off Road and Alternate 27, for he has lived in Lake Wales all of his life, and this area has been a problem.

Mr. Peterson asked Chief Velasquez when we would be getting the traffic signs for the lower speed limit.

Lt. Smith responded that as far as getting the speed limit signs, we are at the mercy of the vendors as to when we will received the signs.

Lt. Smith added a little more information to the statistics mentioned earlier. Of the calls for service, 10 of those calls for service were weapon type calls where a weapon, i.e., knives, guns, were used and 70 arrests were made throughout the month. A couple of the arrests took dangerous criminals off the streets. One having aggravated assault charges with a firearm, in which our CSU unit took him into custody today.

Al Goldstein shared with everyone a response from a friend who is a police chief in Kauai, Hawaii after he asked the police chief what he does about traffic and activities in a high crime area. That police chief advised that they put their lights on. He explained that every one of their patrol cars, when entering a certain area, turn their lights on. He advised it is used to show the area of their presence, to deter burglaries and speeders. Mr. Goldstein suggested the Lake Wales police look into doing that. Lt. Smith advised that is a tactic that Lake Wales uses in high crime areas, and not only the blue lights but the alley lights, which each car has.

COMMUNICATIONS AND PETITIONS:

Andy Oguntola advised he was not present at the last meeting and asked Mr. Peterson if his requests were done for the northwest sector. Mr. Peterson stated his main concerns are the traffic signs, speeders, and the traffic issue at Janie Howard Wilson. He is concerned for the speeders, because someone is going to get hurt.

Citizen Rosalind Dunlop, from 815 Osceola Avenue has a few questions. One of her questions was what are the five top law enforcement policies for the police force as far as what the most important things, at this point, that the police department is looking for. She advised she has not had any personal interaction with officers, but what she has seen is the officers, and they have been very nice, she is just asking what the priorities are going forward. Lt. Smith responded that the agency does not have policies that are more important than another, that there is not one single policy is more important.

Pastor Hernandez of Fuego Church spoke to the group first thanking the officers for their service to the community and asked what they could do, as a local church, to stand with us to work together. Lt. Smith advised that a big thing the churches can do is stress to their members the importance of safety. One of the big issue we have is burglaries, for most burglaries are mostly from unlocked doors. Lt. Smith advised that 95% of burglaries are from unlocked vehicles and or open doors. Lt. Smith recommended he stress to his members to lock up their property.

Terry Christian, from Mammoth Grove, spoke to the group thanking Lt. Smith for the data, but stated they are still having problems with formal complaints from citizens in the Northwest community from three or four months ago that are not addressed. Mr. Christian stated that the officers on the street are doing a great job, but they are still having issues with the administration of the police department, for we need transparency for administration for the complaint reports. What is administration doing about officers not following policy. Mr. Christian advised that something needs to happen with complaints. We need follow-through. Lt. Smith addressed Mr. Christian's concern with the formal complaints. Lt. Smith advised that every complaint we received, we looked into and contacted the person of the complaint. Every complaint is investigated, and a response is sent to the person making the complaint whether it be a letter or E-Mail. Mr. Christian advised he would bring names to next meeting. Lt. Smith stated we do not need to wait until the next meeting. Lt. Smith asked Mr. Christian to have the complainants reach out to him by contacting the Lake Wales Police Department, and he will get those complaints answered that have not been answered. Lt. Smith advised that the letters that have been mailed out, we would re-issue the letter.

Citizen Mr. Dunlop of 815 Osceola Avenue asked if the Lake Wales Police Department operates on the same frequency with other agencies, and if there a specified line that other agencies are contacted with to communicate about active incidents. Lt. Smith explained that the County, like the City, is divided into sectors, and each sector has a dispatch. Every agency in the county with the exception of Lakeland, Bartow and Lake Alfred is dispatched through the Sheriff's Office. The sectors are Southeast, Northeast, Central, Northwest and Southwest. The dispatchers are located in a room similar to a room we are in now, so the dispatchers are continually communicating. If we have a suspect heading to Lakeland, Dispatch will contact Lakeland Police Department Dispatch. However, we are very good at communicating with any agency in the county even though the three agencies are not on the same dispatch. This communication is just not for Polk County, but through the nation. If we need an officer to respond to a situation or home in another state, Dispatch will contact that agency to have an officer respond.

Chief Velasquez spoke to the group first thanking Pastor Hernandez for allowing us to use their Church. Chief Velasquez advised he wanted to speak briefly on the policies. Regarding their priority of our policies, first and foremost safety of community. In addition, traffic is high priority. In addition, managing the growth is a great emphasis right now, preparing for the growth. Polk County is the largest growing county in the State of Florida. We are the seventh fastest growing throughout the nation. It is a very welcoming community, and we are happy and honored to be a part of that. Growing our technological efforts is also a major priority within the Department. We have both elderly and young people moving into the community making it a very diverse population. With this, we run into many economic crimes such as

frauds and fraud. We are reaching out to the community with tips to keep them and their property safe. It is really how we can build the very best Department that we can. We recently had an analysis performed of our Department and the data, and overall it was complimentary. Some issues were pointed out, but nothing of great concern. One recommendation from the analysis was increasing salary and recruiting efforts. Law enforcement has not been looked on as a desirous occupation, for the hours are rough, the people we have to deal with at times are not the good people, and there are times those people will spread rhetoric that is not accurate creating problems for law enforcement, so it is hard to recruit. We will be hiring in one person within a few days, and we will then have one position open. Of all the agencies, we are very Blessed to have a fully staffed Department. With the growth that is coming and the recommendations from CPSM to add five more officers, we are looking at increasing our number of officers. We are looking at what we need to do to be in front of the large growth that is happening. People live in cities because they want regulated growth. We do not know the numbers, but we may be looking at adding five new officers every other year for the next five to ten years. The sheriff's is looking at 50 each year for the next five years.

Sgt. Palmer advised that next month we would meet at Wales Pointe Restaurant.

Andy Oguntola closed with a few comments. He encouraged Pastor Hernandez to spread the word to the Church members of our meetings. He mentioned that the Department is innovative, for we are the first Department to go with body cameras. He also mentioned that if interested in learning more about the Department, the Chief always recommends riding along with an officer for the day. Also, about recruiting, look for some minority recruits, for if you are pulled over, you want to feel comfortable and with someone who looks like you.

Chairman Oguntola advised that the next meeting would be on Monday, April 25 at Wales Pointe Restaurant.

Chairman Oguntola thanked Pastor Hernandez and the members of Fuego Church for letting us come to the house of the Lord.

Pastor Hernandez closed the meeting in prayer.

The meeting adjourned at 6:35 p.m.