



Office of Police Ombudsman Commission Minutes

February 21, 2023

Meeting Minutes:
Meeting called to order at: 5:41 pm

Attendance

- OPOC Commissioners present: Jenny Rose, James Wilburn, Luc Jasmin
- OPOC Commissioners absent: Ladd Smith, Lili Navarrete
- OPO staff members present: Bart Logue, Luvimae Omana and Christina Coty

Briefing Session

- Agenda - Approved
- December Minutes – There was a time change requested. Once that is fixed then it is Approved.

Items Session

- **Police Reform Panel Discussion:** Police Chief Meidl, Council President Beggs, Sheriff Nowels, and Pastor Walter Kendricks
 - **Policing – If an incident like the Tyre Nichols incident occurred in Spokane, what measures are in place to ensure transparency and accountability? Are there any challenges?**
 - **Chief Meidl** – Some accountability measures we have in place for for Use of Force incidents, are Chain of Command Review, Use of Force Review Board. In order to keep transparency, we post the use of force incidents to our website after they have been reviewed. One of the challenges that we face involve hiring, only hiring about 1 out of 20 who pass the written exam.
 - **Sheriff Nowels** – In order to ensure transparency, The state of Washington has put legislation in place involving use of force incidents resulting in the death of a citizen that requires a separate agency to investigate the incident. The SCSO would investigate an incident that involved the SPD and vice versa. It's not a perfect system, the Chief or Sheriff are not allowed to have information about the use of force incident.
 - **Police culture – How does the community perceive police culture from your perspective? Do you have any recommendations for improvement?**
 - Pastor Kendricks – It begins with a lack of trust. There have been efforts made for transparency, however in order to gain trust we need to talk, both the community and SPD.
 - Sheriff Nowels – We are not a monolith. I can walk into any community and get different responses about police culture depending on what they think is good policing and what isn't. We do need to build more trust with every single one of our constituents, even those who trust the police. We need to have active engagement with the community not just when they are in an emergency.
 - Chief Meidl – It depends on what circles in the community you are asking. We stress the importance of our officers gaining trust during every interaction. Not coming into the situation badge heavy or arrogant. Engaging with community leaders is crucial, not just saying that you are available but being available. We have programs in place like the Youth and Police initiative and Police Activities League has now expanded from 1 park with basketball to 3 parks with 8 activities.

- **What are the next steps in the breakdown of the Roundtable talks?**
 - President Beggs – The best part of the community conversation was that people were able to tell their story. We have a new policy advisor for the City Council and we are looking to potentially hire a facilitator to convene the Municipal law and Justice Council with some community members and in the profession, this will be focusing on reforms. There are many of the reforms that have already been agreed upon by the Chief and the Mayor. This will be to focus the reforms that there was not an agreement reached.
- **What changes to the community expect with the Sheriff's Office?**
 - Sheriff Nowels – Being just shy of 60 days as the new Sheriff, I have already informed the department that we are going to be more community focused than we have before. I have already requested that my leadership come back to me with specific, measurable performance measures around community orientated policing. We will set a standard and hold our people accountable. I am hoping to put into place the Neighborhood Resource Officer program.
- **What state legislation regarding policing in the past couple of years has been helpful and what still needs work?**
 - President Beggs – I think the most effective has been surrounding de-escalation techniques. The legislation has provided some actual definitions for it. Utilizing, time and distance has been something the Spokane Police Department have done a great job of and because of that it is now in the statute. There are a few areas that could still use improvement: qualified immunity and the use of police dogs.
 - Chief Meidl – I would echo what President Beggs said regarding de-escalation. Making sure that you are slowing down and having the resources you may need prior to engaging. Rethinking what calls the SPD needs to stay on the scene for.
 - Sheriff Nowels – CIT is really good. I am looking into getting that for the Sheriffs office. Would really like to have more training time, we only get about a week to develop the training skills. I believe that having more time to train on crisis response would really lessen use of force incidents
- **Does police oversight in Spokane meet your expectations? If not what would you change?**
 - Pastor Kendricks – No it doesn't. I would empower the Police Ombudsman. It appears that he is hamstrung in many respects. I believe the apparatus is in place for oversight but that he doesn't have any power.
 - Sheriff Nowels – We have a Sheriff's Citizen Advisory Board (CAB). They have had a very good relationship with the Sheriff. It's important to listen to the boards in a constructive manner, that's where the value derives from.
 - President Beggs – My opinion of where the current powers of the Ombudsman barely meet the threshold of what the citizens voted in. The model that we have is more of a shine the light on situations to make change happen. The Ombudsman does not have any say in disciplinary action. Over the past few years we have seen an increase in power for the Ombudsman.
 - Chief Meidl – When the citizens voted for the Ombudsman position I think that it wasn't written clearly in the ordinance, which left a lot of room for interpretation. I am for civilian oversight 100%. When you look at the authority of the OPO

statewide, Spokane has the second strongest oversight agency next to Seattle which is under consent decree. It would seem that the next step to strengthen the civilian oversight would be that the Ombudsman would be able to come out with a finding, basically stating if it was in policy or out of policy. Which may lead to sanctions and is crucial to an agency.

- **Public Forum:**
 - There were no community members signed up to speak

Commission Business

- **OPOC Retreat**
 - March 7th. Need to follow up to make sure that the date will work.
- **Thank-you to Commissioner Wilburn**
 - Commissioner Jamin – Mr. Wilburn was one of the first people that I met when I moved to Spokane. He has always been a person who is there to help and won't let you fail. I appreciate all you have done, not just for the OPOC but for the community as a whole.
 - Commissioner Rose – Mr. Wilburn came onto the commission about 4 months after I did and it always amazes me at how accomplished he is. I have been in awe of him and how educated and how much he knows. It has been amazing to get to know you and your story.
 - Ombudsman Logue – Commissioner Wilburn you have challenged us where we needed challenging, you didn't let us settle or accept the easy way out. It has been a distinct privilege and honor to work with you.
- **Vice Chair Elections**
 - Commissioner Rose was nominated and accepted the nomination
 - Commissioner Rose was unanimously approved to the Vice Chair position
- **Commissioner Speak Out**
 - Commissioner Rose – I along with Sheriff Nowels and Ombudsman Logue attended a Panel of Community Leaders discussion at the Community School. Where the seniors researched topics that were important to them and then presented to a panel who had the opportunity to respond. It was wonderful and topics I never would have discussed when I was in school they were more college level topics. The second thing that I wanted to discuss was regarding the roundtable discussions. I had already announced last year that I was going to pull myself off the roundtable discussions because it had been so long since we had met and all the legislation had begun to change. I am a bit frustrated because I had sent an email to everyone sitting on the roundtable discussion group and there was not a single response. I just wanted to share my experience publicly

- **Executive Session**
 - **Starts – 7:25**
 - **Ends – 7:34**

Motion Passes or Fails: 2

Meeting Adjourned at: 7:40

**Note: Minutes are summarized by staff. A video recording of the meeting is on file -
Spokane Office of Police Ombudsman Commission**

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