

EDINBURG 2040

BUILDING FOR TOMORROW'S FUTURE, TODAY!

2040 PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

City Hall-Community Room
415 West University Dr.
Edinburg, Texas 78541
January 11, 2023
Time: 6:30 P.M.

- I. Committee Members Present:** Johnny Hernandez, Chair; Aaron Salinas, Sonia Enriquez, Olga Regalado, Ruben Duran, Danielle Mata, Yvonne Garza

Staff Present: Mike Cerda, Assistant Chief of Police; Natalia Velasquez, Director of Building Safety; Maria Ortiz, Administrative Assistant, City Secretary Department; Chad Dufner, Assistant Chief of Police; Shawn Snider, Fire Chief; Jaime Ayala, Chief of Police

- II.** Meeting was called to order at 6:30 P.M.

Mayor Ramiro Garza, Jr. joined the meeting and thanked everyone for participating and serving and helping improve public safety. He stated public safety is very important in the community. Mayor Garza invited everyone to the State of the City Address on Thursday, March 9th 2023 at 6:00 p.m. where they would be highlighting the 2040 Committees.

III. Discussion:

Jaime Ayala, Chief of Police stated based on the feedback from the community they will focus on changing patrol to a beat patrol and have the same officer work the same area and get to know and grow a bond with the community. Another issue to be addressed is space as the city continues to grow, building space is becoming a challenge. He stated policing tends to grow lopsided with too many patrolmen and not enough investigators reviewing cases allowing for customer service to go way down. As they plan the next 20 years of growth they need to be really intentional and grow aligned with what the community needs and what the workload is calling for. In the last 10 to 15 years the presence of social media has really shown the different people that can be attained. It is a great platform to relay live events, so it is really important that in the next year they need to look at leveraging a social media coordinator or event planner. There are a lot of things happening that can be pushed into the community immediately via social media, because that is the news platform. Chief Ayala went on to talk about the safety and security in the community. A grant was approved for installation of surveillance cameras around the concert area and the downtown area. They will be able to monitor and have the ability to go back and look at footage. The surveillance cameras and the drone technology is something to really look into. The drones have proven themselves ten times over, they had a shooter that the drone was able to locate and pinpoint his location. Another goal is improved street lighting, and street signs and to increase code violation enforcement. The Police and Code Enforcement need to work hand in hand to address problems together. They need to address the lack of volunteer programs. There are detectives overwhelmed with their workload but having a volunteer program that can simply call a victim and just let them know their case is being worked on, is good customer service. Another area to look at is enforcing the traffic laws, the main goal is to free up time so that the officers are in neighborhoods mentoring the youth, addressing mental health problems not just crimes. As the city grows demographically and geographically they need to look at deployment of resources and consider a north police facility, greater presence in the parks and the walking trails. The COP Unit handles crime prevention which they are

revamping. They had the first community watch coordinator's meeting, which they will continue to do quarterly, they did a citizen's police academy, the clergy and police partnership is fixing to graduate, and they are looking at volunteerism. There is a dog walker program where people go out and walk their dog and you get them to call 911 when they see things. The COP unit goes to schools, and the boys and girls clubs, and they do tours with kids at the station. They do a lot but the vision is that every officer doing the beat should have the same skill set and police training on problem oriented policing, so that everybody is doing the work of crime prevention and public education and they don't just have four officers for the whole city. Every officer needs to be invested in that same commitment. Coach 5"O" officers' practice and workout with high school students. They are currently piloting the program with Robert Vela High School and Edinburg North High School, the coaches let them know of any issues going on with the student. They mentor the students and their profession is humanized for the youth, helping them see through concepts they get from TV and video games. He said they needed to enhance these programs that help recruit the youth, those that have in their DNA to be a first responder.

Ms. Olga Regalado stated she would talk to the director of the Social Work Program at UTRGV, they are always looking for volunteer sites.

Shawn Snider, Fire Chief, stated currently the city limits is forty-seven square miles. The area is expected to grow north and a lot more to the east increasing the need for fire station No. six and the number of stations will continue going up with the growth in order to manage response time. The goal is to ensure that the fire truck to respond is within a five mile radius. Chief Snider stated that stations 2 and 3 were built in the early 80's and were in need of repairs and remodeling because they do not meet the need for the number of employees. Given the need and the lack of space one or both of these stations may need to be relocated. He said with growth comes the need for staff and trucks. Currently they have forty-five volunteers plus the paid staff and yet there is a ladder truck and a rescue truck that need to be staffed. If station 6 is built then an engine 6 would be needed also, each engine is staffed with a driver, a lieutenant and two firefighters. Communication is big and he too agrees social media is the way to reach all groups of people. He agrees with Chief Ayala that they too need to have someone running and feeding real time information on social media. Chief Snider stated at some point the EMS issue needs to be addressed; eventually the city needs to own and operate its own EMS response service. Those individuals have a better chance than the Police Department and the Fire Department of saving lives if they are effective in their response. This definitely needs to be a goal for the mayor and council because it does come with a high price tag, but it's something that needs to be done fully just like the fire department, the police department or any other city department. It has to be top notch. There is nothing greater in the service aspect of the community than a lifesaving piece that fire, police, and EMS can deliver and that's the missing link. Another thing that needs addressing is that he is the only fire chief that is also the Emergency Management Coordinator except for the chief in Weslaco but their population is like thirty thousand. That needs to be a fulltime job, one of the things that came back from the survey was that people wanted information on emergency management and the only way to do that is to have one person be the coordinator.

Mayor Ramiro Garza, Jr. stated Chief Snider was right it is part of the city and with all the growth they need to factor in how they keep the citizens informed.

Johnny Hernandez, Chair, asked Chief Snider if more fire prevention programs were needed in schools and what if anything was in place for the elderly.

Chief Snider, stated because the fire prevention team visit all the schools from pre-k to 4th grade every student is instilled fire safety 3 to 4 times before they move into middle school. He said the fire prevention team has a fire safety Mariachi skit they do for the elderly along with fire and safety themed bingo.

Co-Chair Sonia Enriquez stated it was important for everyone to voice any goals, ideas, or concerns that had not been mentioned. She would like to see the emergency response time addressed in the future. She would like to see an increase in the budget for personnel from officers to dispatch because as the city grows the manpower needs to be increased. She said the citizens need to be made aware and get involved in crime prevention programs, like neighborhood watch.

Ruben Duran, said as a border patrol agent he did a lot of outreach with kids and one thing that really stuck out is that kids tend to relate to someone from their neighborhood or a person they look up to. The city should consider a partnership with UTRGV and their athletes. Maybe they would be interested in a mentorship and be a motivation for these kids. A lot of these college students are from out of town and don't have family but forming this partnership can help to make them feel welcomed into the community.

Ms. Danielle Mate would like some sort of gun control at UTRGV. She shared her concern of the lack of lighting on Sprague and 10th St. and would like to see some sort of enforcement on the use of the sidewalks.

Ms. Olga Regalado stated she would really like to see the installation/replacement of LED solar lighting throughout the city. She said as part of Crime Stoppers they would continue to help educate on crime prevention.

Ms. Yvonne Garza stated she would like to see more lighting and more patrolling on the west side. She said there has been a lot of racing on both 10th Street and Hwy 107.

Natalia Velasquez, Director of Building Safety introduced herself and stated she was glad to have taken part in the meeting. She stated they had a plan in place to have a team visit the schools to educate the students on building safety and code enforcement. She said she believes education is everything so if you educate the kids they will share and educate the parents.

Mr. Johnny Hernandez stated the lack of lighting seems to be one of the biggest concerns he said the citizens could not use the walking trail on Sugar Rd. and Bus. 281 with the only light coming from the street lights and that needs to be addressed. He stated with the amount of traffic on Schunior Street called for an expansion of the street and Canton Rd. from Cesar Chavez Rd. to Bus. 281 needs to be expanded as well. Mr. Hernandez stated speeding will always be an issue but he believes anyone that is reminded of their speed will attentively reduce their speed. Another great thing about those speed signs is they collect data, helping police determine when and the amount of patrol needed. He said the court house area is going to be a big issue and they need to look into illuminated signs making motorists aware of pedestrians on the crosswalks.

IV. Mr. Johnny Hernandez stated there are many public safety issues that needed to be addressed and he felt they were off to a great start. He asked that everyone continue to make note of areas of concern. Carlos Garza asked if anyone had any issue with hosting the Public Safety meeting on the 3rd Thursday of every month, there were no objections the next meeting was scheduled for Thursday, February 16, 2023.

V. Johnny Hernandez, Chair adjourned the meeting at 7:24 p.m.

By:  _____