
Grand Prairie

T E X A S

PUBLIC SAFETY, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE MINUTES

March 1, 2021

The Public Safety, Health and Environment Committee meeting was called to order by Chairman Jeff Copeland at 4:00 p.m. on March 1, 2021 at Grand Prairie City Hall, Council Chambers; 300 W. Main St., Grand Prairie, Texas.

Attendees:

Committee Members John Lopez (few minutes late) and Cole Humphreys and Chairman Jeff Copeland were present. Staff members present: Deputy City Manager Steve Dye, Assistant City Attorney Tiffany Bull, Assistant Chief of Police Ronnie Morris, Fire Chief Robert Fite, Emergency Management Coordinator Chase Wheeler, Deputy Chief of Police Brad Leonard, Mental Health Coordinator Courtney Runnels, City Manager Assistant Andrew Fortune and Recording Secretary Lana Yancey.

Consider Minutes of February 1, 2021

Chairman Cole Humphreys motioned to approve the minutes as presented, Chairman Copeland was in favor. Minutes passed as presented.

Metal Recycling Briefing

Deputy Chief Brad Leonard briefed the committee on part of this item explaining that Grand Prairie has three metal recycling locations where stolen catalytic converters are being brought. The Grand Prairie Police Department has had a significant rise in stolen catalytic converters, to include at least 260 stolen in 2020 and in 2021 we have already had 66 stolen. Thieves use a hack saw or a Sawzall and can quickly remove many catalytic converters in a short period of time. Our metal recycling locations bring many people from outside of Grand Prairie to sell these stolen items. To further restrict state regulations, we are putting in place a new city ordinance to gain more information on those that are bringing in stolen items. Chairman Copeland asked if the Police Department is investigating these thefts and asked if the metal recyclers are following the rules. Chief Leonard advised that our Auto Theft Detectives are investigating these thefts, but we can't investigate crimes that are going on in other cities. We also do believe that the metal recyclers are following rules. Assistant Chief Ronnie Morris explained that this is a bulk business so in order to make money they are bringing five to ten catalytic converters a week. We believe that this ordinance will be a deterrent to thieves bringing these to our metal recycling locations, therefore keeping criminals out of our city. Assistant City Attorney Tiffany Bull explained state regulations are already strict when it comes to what information they take down from anyone that brings in regulated items to metal recycling locations. People can get around \$50 - \$100 per catalytic converter because of the three precious metals in it, two of which are significantly higher than the price of gold right now. The new ordinance will only allow Auto Repair Businesses with a Certificate of Occupancy (CO) to recycle catalytic converters and it will also require metal recycling employees to take photos of the customers vehicle (front, side and rear), photo of the VIN of their car, thumb prints and require all sales be done in person. There is also a 72-hour hold put on all catalytic converters before metal recyclers can receive funds for them. They are required to take a picture of any identifying

numbers or damage on any regulated items, which include catalytic converters. Nationwide there has been a rise in thefts of catalytic converters due to the high unemployment rate and the amount of cash one can get because of the precious metals in these items. This ordinance will prohibit metal recyclers from buying a catalytic from a private individual. Mr. Steve Dye advised that this new ordinance will not harm any legit auto repair business, it will only harm the thieves. This ordinance will also have a ripple effect to surrounding cities and may reduce the theft of catalytic converters. Chairman Copeland doesn't want to get into the Police Departments business but suggested undercover operations because he wants to get the thumb prints and information of the thieves so that we know who these people are. Mr. Steve Dye explained that a corporate company contacted GPPD about a large loss and asked what we could do to help eliminate the theft of catalytic converters. Grand Prairie Police Department is often looked upon as a leader and is always innovative in coming up with new ways to catch the bad guys. Chairman Copeland asked when this ordinance is going to Council. Ms. Bull advised that there must be a 30-day notice of a public hearing to prohibit the sell regulated material, so the earliest this ordinance can go to Council is in April. Chief Morris advised in the next month we can do undercover operations to identify those who are bringing in stolen catalytic converters to Grand Prairie Metal Recyclers. Auto Business Repairmen are the only legitimate people that should be bringing these items in, so these customers will have to bring their CO with them. Committee Member Lopez asked how do we know the CO is validated and are we accepting them from other cities. Ms. Bull advised it is any CO and the paperwork must be maintained every two years, otherwise it is a misdemeanor under state law to present a fraudulent CO. Auto Business Repairmen should be aware of how to store and keep a CO and anytime we have a new ordinance they are notified by the city. Public Safety, Health and Environment Committee is in favor of this ordinance and Mr. Dye suggested to come back to this committee before we get resolution from Council on April 6th to make sure that everything is agreeable.

A resolution ratifying support of a Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) application to the Office of Governor, Public Safety Office, Criminal Justice Division for \$86,000 in total funding for the purpose of funding a Crisis Support Specialist position's annual salary and fringe benefits

Crisis Support Supervisor Courtney Runnels briefed the committee on this item. She explained that the Police Department has me and one Crisis Support Specialist in which we are paired up with a Crisis Support Officer each. This grant will allow us to hire an additional Crisis Support Specialist to include medical benefits. We do about 700 emergency detentions per year, which means we bring them to a mental health facility when we feel they are a danger to themselves or others. We are seeing an increase in mental health calls that do not result in hospitalization. The new team of a Crisis Support Specialist and a Mental Health Officer will work during evening hours and we should know if we are approved for this grant by this summer. The purpose of this unit is to follow up with mental health patients and to also tackle the homeless population. We also respond to calls for service at all hours. Chairman Copeland thinks this is a wonderful addition to our COPE program. Ms. Runnels advised that we have about 10 people that have signed up for the COPE program, but we are working to get more people on board. Chairman Copeland is planning to educate on the COPE program to charities and the previous Mayor of Irving, Beth Van Duyn who is now a member of the House of Representatives to get support for this program. Chairman Copeland thinks this is a bipartisan program that satisfies the "defund the police" people and really anyone. He is planning to speak with Mrs. Runnels to get more details about this program and other things that we are doing to support our mentally ill population. Mrs. Runnels explained the Crisis Support Specialist will be required to have a master's degree, and regarding the Police Officer that is paired up with the new specialist, we have multiple Officers that are qualified. Regarding JAG grants they rate each city and then decide how much money they give out so we don't know how much if any funding we will receive. Assistant Chief Morris explained they also look at how our department could handle hiring another crisis specialist. Mr. Dye explained that the police departments two victim assistance positions are grant funded and Mr. Hart and I decided years ago that if we don't receive grant funding we will find money in the general budget to keep these positions because they are instrumental to helping our department. Mr. Dye thinks that it will likely be the same with the crisis support specialist position. Committee members were in favor of this with no further discussion.

Community Assistance Update

Andrew Fortune briefed the committee on this item. Grand Prairie United Charities distributed a little over \$80,000 of the new funding and we have approximately \$282,000 left to help people with rent payments. We have had about 12-13 applicants as of now, but we are still getting the word out about this assistance. By the end of March, we may see an increase in applicants, depending on the Federal level. During the winter storm, Grand Prairie Police Department sent a few people our way that we were able to pay some utilities and rent for. We continue to deconflict daily with both counties so that we don't have people double dipping. We have been able to distribute over 32,448 boxes of food at a few different food distributions within the city, and a special thanks to the help of the police department at those events. Will have another update next month. Nothing further.

Weather/Storm Update

Fire Chief Robert Fite briefed the committee on this item. He started off with stating that his mother in law was able to receive emergency assistance from Grand Prairie United Charities to help with rent to get her by. We were very appreciative of that. In regard to the winter storm update, we are in the process of creating an after-action report and will distribute to all department heads and Council. During the Winter Storm Emergency Management activated an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) on the 2nd floor of the Public Safety Building. The primary EOC is located at the CVE but has been in use by police and fire communications for months now due to COVID, so we had to improvise. In the long run we are going to brainstorm where we could make a permanent EOC to maybe share with neighboring cities. The EOC's are not as expensive as you would think, it just needs to be weatherized to withstand extremely high winds. I want to talk about ATMOS, because this all started on Friday before the storm when the fire department started receiving calls from sprinkler companies asking to shut off sprinkler systems to small businesses. The state requires sprinkler system companies to get permission from the fire marshal in order to turn off this service, which includes turning off gas. After the EOC is setup and running on Friday, Sunday evening Emergency Management receives a request from ATMOS to have an emergency zoom meeting and by the end of that call the gas was shut off to the Peninsula neighborhood in Grand Prairie. What prompted the warming station at Ruthe Jackson Center was when the fire department ran a call on a hypothermic female in which it was 22 degrees in her trailer. It took only 2 hours to get the warming station setup and running in which water, snacks and coffee were provided. The sewage at the lift station was 2 feet away from overflowing in which we were trying to figure out where the runoff would go and it was probably going to be the lake. We had a third of our city signals out, but fortunately there weren't many people on the road. Oxford Memory Care had to be evacuated and we tried to use DART, but they would not help since we aren't a member city. ATMOS was able to give Oxford Memory Care some gas from a truck so we didn't have to evacuate them. The Estates at Grand Prairie were going to have to be evacuated as well because of flooding in the building due to frozen pipes, but we were able to get that shut off. There were multiple city facilities damaged due to frozen pipes, we were attempting to get fire wood to citizens who needed it, both hospitals in Arlington closed because they lost water, the city of Arlington called us for emergency relief for fire help because they had no water, but since we do not have tanker trucks we could not help. Those were just the big challenges; I know that City Council members and Officials were contacted by various means due to citizens losing electricity and other utilities. Chief Fite shared a map of Sunday afternoon from ATMOS showing the center of Mira Lagos Neighborhood being the low and problem spot for ATMOS. Their strategic decision was to shut the gas off to three valves in that area, so the entire peninsula lost gas, including Fire Station 10 and ATMOS has no answers of why. Mr. Steve Dye advised that he was on the phone with ATMOS everyday asking for answers as to why they turned the gas off to that entire area. ATMOS did say that it was turned off so that the pressure to other residents in other areas would stay up. Someone from the corporate office has been requested to attend the next City Council Meeting. We worked with Stacy McGrath, the liaison with the Mira Lagos HOA so the communication was there. Chief Fite will be presenting this and more details on these issues at the next City Council

Meeting (tomorrow night). Chairman Copeland asked if we had any damage to Fire Apparatus. Chief Fite explained thankfully no, we have four-wheel drive on all our apparatus. Mr. Steve Dye explained that we have changed protocols a little so that anytime we have a critical or significant incident we will have an after-action analysis with all directors to go over what went well and what we can do better in the future. The communication between emergency management and directors went great and how we all responded to each other and got things done. Committee Member Lopez asked about communication with Buddy at Oncor. Mr. Steve Dye said that Buddy was very responsive as always but Oncor and ATMOS did a bad job at communicating with residents and communicating the facts on what is going on.

Meeting adjourned at 5:04 p.m.

Executive Session

There was no executive session.



Jeff Copeland, Chairman