

ALEXANDRIA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION  
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2022  
7:00 p.m.  
VIRTUAL (Zoom)

Members Present

Lisl Brunner, Vice Chair  
Janeka Cogdell  
Kevin Edwards, Vice Chair  
Lynette Foster  
Matt Harris, Chair  
Susan Kellom  
Elizabeth "PJ" Palmer Johnson  
David Rigsby

Staff Present

Jean Kelleher, Director  
David Miller, Investigator  
Miladis Martinez Gutierrez, Adm. Support

Members Excused

Danielle Beach  
Chris Harris  
Scott Schwartz

Members Un-Excused

Michelle Cho

Guests

Don Hayes, Acting Chief of the Alexandria Police Department  
Jeff Harrington, Sergeant oversees the Office of External Affairs  
Cortney Ballantine, Acting Captain oversees the Community Relations Division

**1. Call to Order/Introductions by Chair Harris**

Chair Harris called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. Introductions were made. Chair Harris welcomed special guest Acting Alexandria Police Chief, Don Hayes.

**2. Approval of January Minutes**

Upon a motion by Vice Chair Brunner, seconded by Commissioner Palmer Johnson, the Commission approved the minutes of the January meeting. All Commissioners present voted aye.

**3. Guest: Acting Chief of the Alexandria Police Department, Don Hayes**

Chair Harris welcomed and introduced Acting Alexandria Police Chief, Don Hayes ("Chief Hayes") and said that it is a well-deserved position that Chief Hayes is holding right now. Chair Harris also stated that Chief Hays has attended many Commission meetings in other capacities, and also attended the big hearing on excess of use of force. Chief Hayes started by thanking the Commission and said that it is an honor to be here tonight. He also stated that he does not know what role the Commission will play when the Community Policing Review Board takes over, but he hopes that the Commission understands that the Police Department will still want to work with the Commission, and to get input from the Commission as far as how the Department continues to do business in the City.

Chief Hayes stated that he wanted to talk about the diversity aspect of the Police Department and said that it is very challenging for them to do that right now. He said that they are actively recruiting, and it is hard to get people of color to want to be police officers because of the current climate. He said that they are doing a robust recruiting effort and they are visiting neighborhoods and trying to get people to understand that this is a very honorable profession and that they need to have a diverse Police Department in order for them to do their job.

Sergeant Jeff Harrington gave an overview of the Police Department's sworn employees by rank. Total females are 63 and 43 are White; 9 are Black; 9 are Hispanic and 2 are Asian. Total Males are 242 and 147 are White; 43 are Black; 29 are Hispanic; 15 are Asian and 8 are other.

Chief Hayes stated that they are beginning to see more females in the department, but when looking at the total breakdown it is very low. He also added that they hire a lot more females of color, but they just do not stay and said that they have to figure out the reason as to why they do not stay. He added that they started a mentoring program to try to get them to understand that they really want them to stay, and they are reaching out to them earlier and walking them through the academy process and said that they are doing a real targeted effort to get females to understand that they actually belong at the Alexandria Police Department. He added that in the last six months they have hired 3 black females and they are gone already. Commissioner Kellom asked what sort of exit interview he has with them when they leave. Chief Hayes stated that he interviews them to get them to tell him the reason why they are leaving and a lot of them said that they have tried it and it is not just for them. One of them left because of the current climate that just was not a good fit for her and her family. He added that the terminology of these days is black and blue; you are an African American, but you are wearing a blue uniform and there is a struggle there in that concept that with the understanding that you can do both, but if you do not have the support system there a lot of times is hard.

Sergeant Jeff Harrington reported on current academy recruit's breakdown by race and gender and said that there is a total of 5 females (2 Whites, 2 Blacks and 1 Hispanic); he also reported that there are 9 males (1 White, 6 Blacks, 1 Asian and 1 Hispanic). Chair Harris asked if the black and blue narrative applies to Black male officers or Black female officers only. Chief Hayes stated that it applies to both. Vice Chair Edwards asked what the issue is in getting the current officers into leadership positions. Chief Hayes stated that when you see him, you see 50% of the minority command staff and the challenge is that they cannot even stay; they had three that left within the past two years, which he really wanted them to stay. He stated that one of the officers that left is working for a Fellowship Church in the City of Alexandria as their Security Director; the other one wanted to go to a different direction and is now working with young men and youth; the African American female Lieutenant went to Prince William County and then moved to Texas, so it is hard to keep them.

Chief Hayes stated that right now they have five minority Sergeants and said that they have lost two of them and he will be losing two more, so he can even keep them in the Sergeant rank to stay long enough to take the other process to get in. He stated that it is a challenge, but that they just have to find the right approach to get them to understand that what they are being challenged with is bigger than them as individuals. He said that they might have to go look outside the agency when they start doing their promotional process so that they can beggins to bring in some minorities to help them be a diversified organization.

Director Kelleher stated that one thing that she has always hoped for is a cadet program at the Alexandria High School, which is very diverse or away to encourage young people who live in Alexandria to want to stay in their community, to want to be in public safety whether it is Police, Fire or Sheriff.

Acting Captain, Cortney Ballantine stated that they have been talking about a cadet program for the last six months and he has put a proposal together to create such a program and they are targeting 18 and 21

years of age is what they are targeting. He added that once they graduate from High School and they will bring them into their program as seasonal employees, pay them money, train them, and give them some certification through the state. He also added that they would partner with Northern Virginia Community College to help reach that gap of higher education and while they are doing all these things, they will be able to obtain an Associate Degree; this is a perfect opportunity for young people. He also added that they have also been talking about a teen academy for the ages of 16 and 17, Junior/Senior years. He also stated that they are reaching out to other partners in public safety, the Sheriff's Office, Communications Center as well as the Fire Department to partner with them to see how they can share the wealth.

Commissioner Foster asked how does the salary that the Alexandria Police Department offers compares to the surrounding jurisdictions and could that be the reason why employees are leaving. Chief Hayes stated that that has something to do with it, but that City Council is trying to address that in the coming budget to get them somewhere near that; but said that when he does the exit interviews, a lot of people are not leaving to go to law enforcement agencies, they are just leaving. As far as the recruiting part goes, the salary does play a role, because if they can find a job closer to their homes and make seven thousand dollars more, they are probably going to take that job. He stated that they can compete with any jurisdiction around the area as far as the work they do, the size of the agency, and the technology they have. Commissioner Cogdell asked how many kids of color participated in the teen academy that was active before the pandemic. Sergeant Ballentine stated that he did not have that information with him, but Chief Hayes stated that it was very diversified.

Commissioner Cogdell asked if the Police Department has put in place to implement building effective relationships with the Community and the students during the cadet academy. She asked if there is anything put in the proposal with the cadet or teen academy. Chief Hayes stated that before covid they were having town hall meetings, cook-outs, and they had partnered with the Recreation Department to go out into the community and develop a relationship with them. He added that they are actively looking for ways to develop relationships with the community. Commissioner Cogdell also brought up an incident that happened with her daughter over the summertime; she was approached by two uniform officers and got her name, and they never gave her a business card or asked for her parents. Chief Hayes stated that the Police Department needs to be contacted so that the Department can address the issue and they take these issues very seriously and they will investigate if they have to.

Commissioner Cogdell expressed her concern about assigning Community Police Officers to the High School as School Resource Officers; with the lack of relationship and the lack of trust in policing and suggested having a different type of security at the school. Chief Hayes stated that there is a Task Force working on a solution to basically find another alternative to School Resource Officers. Sergeant Ballentine stated in regard to the school resource officer that idea is to have the most trained professional person in the schools to make sure it is a safe environment. Commissioner Cogdell asked if there is anything that is implemented with building effective relationships with the community in their policy. Sergeant Ballentine stated that they want to show these future Police Officers Cadets the right way to be part of the community, so they would do everything as part of that training, engaging with the community. Chair Harris stated that, unfortunately the SRO issue will not be resolved here, but suggested inviting Jacinta Greene back to come to speak about the School Resource Officers.

Investigator Miller suggested adding an element of leadership as the Police Department is developing a curriculum for their program for the youth. Chair Harris talked about an incident where there was an officer in the District of Columbia, who is being investigated for being a white supremacist and asked Chief Hayes how he would handle that and if knows any folks on the force who may have those types of sympathy. Chief Hayes stated that they actually do not and said that they are probably in a different direction as to where that goes. He stated that he has a quarterly meeting with all the command staff, and he challenges them with questions about race, and they talk about uncomfortable conversations that they need to have. Chair Harris how is the general morale among races, because a couple of years ago, there was a report in the newspapers about an African American woman who was complaining about being harassed by fellow officers and asked if was that case ever resolved and asked if moral is ok. Chief Hayes said that the case was unfounded and said that morale is better, but it could be even better, but they are going through a process of adjusting to new leadership.

Director Kelleher asked Acting Police Chief Hayes to comment on the balancing act between our experience here in Alexandria and what is happening Nationwide and how challenging and difficult that is for the officers and what they are dealing here in APD with that narrative that is swirling around us. Chief Hayes stated that they always form the National narrative and cannot get away from it, because they wear uniforms, which is an identity. He added that they have not always done what they are supposed to do in this uniform and apologized to people to get them to understand that he understands why people do not trust them in this uniform. He added that they do not tolerate bias-based policing and said that they believe in their integrity and added that as a department they have felt the heat because of the National narrative. He added that they are not a perfect Police Department, and they are going to make mistakes, people have got to give them a chance to rectify that, so that they can move forward together. Chief Hayes said that his statement is that Police Departments are necessary, but they are not sufficient to deal with all the things that are happening in the communities.

Commissioner Palme Johnson asked Chief Hayes to comment on the Domestic Violence Unit within the Police Department. Sergeant Harrington stated that it is not a large unit and said that the unit takes cases that are handled by patrol and said that they respond to domestic violence when it requires a mandated arrest. He added that they work closely with the domestic violence shelter, in particular, to make sure that the victims are receiving the social care that they need outside the police department. He stated that there are two detectives and a sergeant assigned to that unit.

Chair Harris thanked Chief Hayes, Sergeant Harrington, and Captain Ballantine for their presentation.

#### **4. Executive Committee /Upcoming Meetings**

Chair Harris stated that the Executive Committee met last Monday and said that Senator Scott Surovell came to speak about contributory negligence.

Vice Chair Brunner stated that the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services will bring three guests to speak about the pre-trial risk assessment instrument issue at the March Commission meeting.

Chair Harris stated that there are currently two vacancies on the Commission: one is a liaison from Alexandria Commission on Persons with Disabilities and the other one is a liaison from the Landlord and Tenant Relations Board.

Chair Harris announced that Vice Chair Edwards is leaving after the March meeting because he is moving to Charlotte, North Carolina

## **6. Old and New Business**

### Alexandria's Community Remembrance Project

Director Kelleher stated that there will be events beginning to happen to commemorate individuals who were lynched; one will be in April and the other one in August. She stated that there will be a Pilgrimage that is being planned to the Equal Justice Institute in Montgomery, Alabama in October 2022.

### Rainbow Crosswalk letter

Director Kelleher stated that she had talked to Deborah Collins about the rainbow crosswalk letter and asked her to check with the new City Manager and to find out how the Commission should proceed.

Director Kelleher also announced that the new City Manager release his budget proposal to City Council last night and there will be public meetings coming up.

## **7. Liaison Reports**

Commissioner Palmer Johnson reported that the Commission for Women will be requesting meetings with the Mayor and City Council regarding affordable Housing, Domestic Violence, and Sexual Assault. She reported that as part of that she has been asked to compile a report on the Ramsey housing and will share a copy of that report with the Human Rights Commission.

Commissioner Cogdell reported that the Work Force Development Center is helping out the senior community in finding job placement.

## **8. Announcements /Adjournment**

**MOTION:** adjourn the meeting.

Palmer Johnson/Edwards **PASSED** unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:41 p.m.