

The Village President and Board of Trustees of the Village of Riverside held a **Special Meeting** for the purpose of hosting a Community Conversation with the Riverside Police Department Command Staff. Public comments and questions for the Riverside Police Department Command Staff were welcome when received by email or in writing by the Village Clerk prior to 5:00 p.m. on the day of the meeting. While emailed or written comments or questions were strongly encouraged, comments and questions were also facilitated in person. Physical spacing was observed, but public access to the physical meeting site was facilitated.



VILLAGE OF RIVERSIDE
SPECIAL MEETING
OF THE VILLAGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION
WITH THE RIVERSIDE POLICE DEPARTMENT

Minutes

I. Call to Order: The Special Meeting was held in the Riverside Township Auditorium, 27 Riverside Road, Riverside, IL, on Thursday, August 20, 2020. President Sells called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

II. Roll Call:

Present:	President Sells Police Chief Thomas Weitzel Deputy Police Chief William Gutschick Police Lieutenant Frank Lara
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Also Present:	Village Manager Frances Village Clerk Haley Trustee Evans Trustee Gallegos by phone Trustee Jisa arrived at 6:03 p.m. Trustee Hannon arrived at 6:04 p.m. Trustee Collins arrived at 6:17 p.m. Trustee Pollock arrived at 6:45 p.m.
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III. Pledge of Allegiance

IV. Presentation by Riverside Police Department Command Staff

President Sells introduced the Riverside Police Department Command Staff and provided an overview of their qualifications. He noted that Chief Weitzel has a Master's Degree in Criminal Social Justice and is a graduate of the Northwestern University Center for Public Safety School of Staff and Command. Deputy Chief Gutschick and Lieutenant Lara are also graduates of the Northwestern University Center for Public Safety School of Staff and Command and all three have many additional certifications and designations. Their combined years of experience in policing exceeds 90 years.

V. *Conversation and Public Comment*

President Sells asked Chief Weitzel to give an overview of the department to answer general questions people might have regarding staffing and operations. Weitzel noted that the department is presently staffed with 19 employees including himself. He stated that although the department is small, they are diverse, efficient and well trained. Many officers who work in Riverside spend their entire law enforcement career in the community.

President Sells stated that many in the community have inquired about the following topic. What is the selection and hiring process for becoming a police officer in Riverside?

Chief Weitzel stated that the process is governed by state statute and overseen by the Board of Fire and Police Commissioners of Riverside. This three person volunteer board is responsible for the hiring and discipline of Riverside Police Officers. All BFPC members are residents of Riverside. The process includes a written test, an oral examination and personal interview. Per statute, preference points are granted for prior military service and education. Anyone who applies for a job as a Riverside police officer must go through this process. All applicants are ranked and a list is posted that shows the rankings. When there is an opening, the person at the top of the list is contacted first. Chief Weitzel plays no role in the hiring process.

President Sells read a question asking if the results of the BFPC vetting process are made public and if there are psychological exams. If so, are the exams conducted by a public or private entity?

Chief Weitzel stated that the results of the required background investigation, physical exam and psychological exam are covered by state statute and are not subject to public disclosure. Candidates do not even receive the results. An independent company conducts the exams for Riverside. Background investigations are conducted by Riverside detectives. All reports are delivered to the BFPC, not the Chief.

President Sells noted that many in the community have inquired about officer training. He asked Chief Weitzel to elaborate on the training regimen in Riverside.

Chief Weitzel noted that all officers must complete 16 weeks of training at the Police Academy. Once that training is complete, new officers must complete a field training program in Riverside that typically lasts between three to five months. During this training program, probationary officers learn the finer points of policing in Riverside. This is when they will learn about the values and expectations of the community. Deputy Chief Gutschick noted that training does not stop when an officer is hired. Training is ongoing with 20 hours of training on various topic required per year. He noted that every Riverside officer has completed their mandated training and exceeded what is required. He noted that training involves much more than going to the shooting range. The majority of training completed by officers is done in the classroom with topics as varied as diversity, human rights, de-escalation techniques, procedural justice and legal updates.

President Sells inquired about bias training.

Deputy Chief Gutschick stated that bias and mental health are ongoing topics covered in training. The department last completed bias training in November of 2019.

President Sells read a question from a resident who inquired about the non-policing needs the department is seeing in the community.

Chief Weitzel stated that without a doubt, officers are responding to more and more non-police matters such as calls for well-being checks and mental health issues. Officers have some training in how to deal with these issues; however, he feels more training is needed. He would like to have a social worker or

other mental health professional available to respond to these types of calls with an officer. If police respond to a call and someone needs medical attention, they call paramedics and the individual is frequently transported to a local hospital which may also be overwhelmed and ill-equipped to deal with acute mental health situations. He believes this situation is not unique to Riverside, but is a general societal trend. He would welcome assistance from a social worker or other mental health professional.

Resident Emily Kowal stated that there is a part-time mental health professional on the Riverside payroll. She asked if consideration has been given to hiring an additional person or hiring this individual full-time to assist the Riverside Police Department. It should be noted that there is not a part-time mental health professional on the village payroll but there is an individual employed by an outside agency which receives funding from the Riverside Township Mental Health Board. Chief Weitzel stated that the Police Department staff has met this individual and would absolutely welcome additional partnership opportunities through the Riverside Township Mental Health Board. However, he does not believe additional funding is presently available.

Trustee Hannon asked President Sells to clarify the difference between the Village of Riverside and Riverside Township. President Sells noted that the Village of Riverside is the municipal corporation of Riverside. Riverside Township includes the Village of Riverside, the majority of North Riverside, the Hollywood section of Brookfield, a small portion of Lyons and unincorporated Riverside Lawn. He noted that township government predates municipal government and it is a completely different governing and taxation structure which includes a levy for the mental health of residents. The social worker being discussed is funded through this township tax levy.

President Sells then turned the discussion to the topic of excessive force. He asked if Riverside has had any excessive force complaints.

Chief Weitzel stated that he has been the Chief of Police since 2008 and there has not been an excessive force complaint during his tenure. He attributed this to detailed department policies and procedures which have been developed in consultation with the village's attorneys and insurance carrier. He noted that any use of force must be documented by officers. This includes deploying a Taser, which happens very rarely, and even simply displaying a Taser.

President Sells noted that he received an inquiry from a resident asking for a definition of "necessary force."

Chief Weitzel stated that necessary force is the force required to affect and arrest. Once an individual is in custody, force stops. Weitzel stated that most Riverside arrests do not require the use of force; however, he noted that DUI arrests sometimes require force because intoxicated individuals are occasionally uncooperative. He noted that there is always a supervisor on duty, either a Sergeant or an Officer in Charge, and officers can always call for assistance.

President Sells asked Chief Weitzel to explain what the process would be if the department received a complaint of excessive force.

Chief Weitzel stated that complaint forms are available in the lobby and on the village website or an individual can email him directly. An individual is also welcome to call or come into the lobby and ask to speak with a supervisor. If a complaint is filed, Deputy Chief Gutschick or Lieutenant Lara will investigate and provide him with a written report of their findings. The person who initiated the complaint is also notified of the findings in a letter from the chief. Deputy Chief Gutschick stated that any complaint of any nature that comes in is investigated. President Sells noted that the Village Manager would investigate a complaint against Chief Weitzel.

President Sells asked the panel how policing today is different than it was when they began their careers in law enforcement.

Chief Weitzel stated that the single biggest change he has seen is in the use of technology. Policing is much more evidence and data driven than it used to be. Weitzel also noted that officers have more formal education today than they did when he was starting his career. He noted that many police officers now have a four year college degree. Weitzel stated that 62 individuals have applied to take the police officer exam the village is offering in September and two of those applicants have law degrees.

Deputy Chief Gutschick stated that the biggest change he has seen has been a shifting of responsibility for certain tasks that used to be handled by the State's Attorney's office or other entity to local police departments. When he began his career, officers would make an arrest and refer the case to the State's Attorney's office. Police officers are now required to do significantly more paperwork than what was required years ago.

Lieutenant Lara stated that the biggest change he has seen is an increase in person on person crimes as compared with property crimes. He also stated that the courts and the community expect much more from police officers than they used to. The police are regularly called upon to solve problems that are outside the scope of traditional policing and they do not always have the time or resources to address these situations as well as they would like to. They do the best they can.

President Sells asked the panelists if they have noticed a change in the relationship between the department and the community during their time in Riverside.

Chief Weitzel stated that community support for the Police Department has always been fantastic in Riverside. He stated that residents regularly call him to thank him for something an officer did and people regularly drop off food or restaurant gift cards for the department. He stated that the relationship with residents, school staff and the community at large has always been and remains supportive.

Deputy Chief Gutschick concurred and stated that he believes the department has the support of the community because employees do a good job. There have been no excessive force complaints because department employees hold themselves to a higher standard of conduct.

An unidentified 20 year resident of the village who was seated in the audience stated that she had "nothing but great things to say about the Riverside Police Department." She said that she and her teenage children have had some interactions with the department and officers have always been professional and compassionate. She stated that she believes the officers genuinely care about the residents and the community and she expressed her gratitude to the panel.

Chief Weitzel thanked the woman for her comments and noted that the department has two officers who live in Riverside. They know the community. He said the department is a good blend of people, noting that they have officers who are fluent in Spanish, African American officers, a female officer and someone who is fluent in American Sign Language. Employees are invested in the community. They chose to come to Riverside and many will serve the community for the duration of their careers.

President Sells asked if diversity is a consideration in hiring police officers in Riverside.

Chief Weitzel stated that the BFPC conducts the hiring process in accordance with state statute. Scores from the required written and oral exams are tallied along with any applicable preference points for military service, education, participation in the Police Explorer program, etc., and this is what is used to

rank applicants and create the initial list of eligible officer candidates. He noted that the department advertises job openings in a publication that is distributed to every college and university in the area. The department also attends college job fairs throughout the Chicago area to promote the department and the community in order to recruit potential officer candidates.

President Sells read a question from the audience regarding the need for police officers to have assistance from mental health professionals when responding to some calls and asking if the Chief had any intention of addressing this issue or if the department would simply wait until state funding was allocated to address this need.

Chief Weitzel stated that he does not intend to wait for Springfield to address the need for mental health response teams. He will take the lead in calling attention to the matter through his service on the Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police Legislative Committee. The group will be lobbying in Springfield to seek funding for more officer training and funding for mental health response teams. He believes legislators will be receptive to these requests.

President Sells read a question from the audience inquiring as to what Riverside's greatest public safety threat is and what the department is doing to address it.

Chief Weitzel stated that he sees the increase in person on person crime as Riverside's greatest public safety threat. He noted that historically, Riverside has been a community that has experienced mostly property crime, not violent crime. He stated that the department is putting unmarked cars on the street at specific times and partnering with neighboring communities to share information.

President Sells read a question from the audience regarding the new anonymous hotline and the definition of "suspicious". The inquiry also asked for clarification regarding how officers determine what to investigate and whether racism could play a role in someone being considered "suspicious".

Chief Weitzel stated that it is absolutely possible that racism may play a role in someone being described as "suspicious," but the department is obligated by law to respond to all 911 calls. He believes dispatchers should be trained to keep callers on the line to obtain specific details regarding why the caller feels a person or situation is suspicious. Just as there are protocols for calls coming in regarding medical emergencies such as a suspected heart attack, there should be protocols for suspicious person calls.

Resident Bailey Hastings asked if the department makes contact with every suspicious person.

Chief Weitzel stated that the officers do not force contact. Frequently, officers will request additional details from the dispatch center in order to get a better idea of what the situation may be. If an officer responds to a suspicious person call and observes a person matching the description provided by the dispatch center, the officer may or may not attempt contact depending on what they observe. If the officer does not observe any illegal activity, they may simply close out the call by noting that no criminal activity was observed.

President Sells noted that the community calls upon the police to solve crimes and keep people safe. He asked what society can do to address the bigger issues that are causing crime.

Chief Weitzel stated that it is important for people to work together. Partnerships between the police department and the community are key. He is also involved in the non-profit organization "Fight Crime - Invest in Kids Illinois," which advocates for programs that prevent crime and violence. He noted that many people who commit crimes, tell the arresting officer that they committed the crime because they have lost their job and have no income. The police are not unsympathetic to the harsh realities of peoples' situations. Weitzel believes that if society supports programs that address the issues of unemployment, poverty, lack of education and systemic bias, there will be a decrease in crime.

Deputy Chief Gutschick concurred and added substance abuse and addiction to the list of societal ills that lead to criminal activity. He stated that drug abuse and addiction destroys families and leads people to commit crimes to fund their addictions. He praised the work done by treatment centers like Rosecrance and Gateway, but noted that without good health insurance, it is really difficult to get into these treatment programs. He believes the public needs to be educated on how to recognize the signs of addiction and how to intervene early. Funding for treatment is also a necessity.

Lieutenant Lara agreed and stated that all of the officers in the department support Chief Weitzel's positions regarding social justice issues. They are unified in the belief that all of these issues are related and society needs to find ways to address them. They do what they can to help the people they come into contact with.

President Sells read a question from the audience regarding what the Police Department and the Village of Riverside are doing to address poverty and education inequality.

He noted that with regard to poverty and hunger, the faith community has taken the lead in responding. He stated that if anyone in the community has ideas for addressing these societal issues on a local level, he is willing to listen.

President Sells read a question regarding the availability of Police Department annual and quarterly reports on the village website.

Chief Weitzel stated that the annual reports are available on the Police Department page of the village website and there are printed copies of the 2019 Annual Report on the table near the entrance to the Auditorium.

President Sells read a question regarding the duties of Auxiliary Police Officers and the need for them to carry a firearm.

Chief Weitzel stated that there are currently only two Auxiliary officers and their primary function is to assist sworn officers at large events. Auxiliary officers are not paid, but they must complete mandatory training. He noted that the ordinance establishing the Auxiliary was approved in the 1940s and at that time, they were authorized to carry firearms. If the community no longer supports arming these volunteers, the Board can approve an amendment to the Municipal Code.

President Sells asked the final question of the evening: What is the future of policing?

Chief Weitzel stated that he believes there will be changes in statutes and laws which will lead to the creation of a new policing model. He expressed support for the concept of "Community Policing," and stated that he believes the Riverside Police Department has been doing Community Policing all along. Riverside is a small community. The officers and the residents know each other and work together. He believes that the changes that are coming will lead to a better trained, more just and compassionate police force.

Deputy Chief Gutschick concurred and noted that the profession is constantly evolving.

President Sells thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and stated that it was the first of what will be an ongoing dialogue between the department and the community.

Chief Weitzel thanked President Sells, the Village Board, the Village Manager and the Police Department command staff for their support. He stated that he wants residents to understand that they have a compassionate, well trained police force serving and protecting them. He will be advocating for change

in Springfield later this year. He fully supports a national policy and standards for use of force. He also supports uniform national certification criteria for police officers. He believes that bad police officers need to be eliminated from the profession. To that end, he supports a national database for reporting use of force and misconduct so an officer with a history of problematic behavior cannot simply leave one jurisdiction and pick up where he or she left off in another state. He will also continue working with Fight Crime Invest in Kids to support initiatives promoting health care and early childhood education.

VI. *Adjournment*

President Sells again thanked everyone for their participation and called for a motion and second to adjourn the meeting. Trustee **Hannon made a motion** to adjourn. Trustee **Collins seconded the motion. All in favor by voice vote.**

President Sells declared the Special Meeting adjourned at 7:09 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Village Clerk Haley

Date Approved