

Joint Police Advisory Council
Thursday, August 6, 2020, 5:00-6:30 pm
Via Zoom
Minutes

JPAC Members in attendance via Zoom: Chief Powers, Chief Pyle, Chad Barnhardt, Jackie Wolf, Ally Rapp Lee, Peter Kemeni, Andrew Chiki, Molly Burchfield, Josh Thomas, Karen Dahn, MaryKathyrine Tran, Maria Modayil, Kim Castor

Chad and Chief Pyle introduced a new student representative to JPAC—**Peter Kemeni**.

Update on Course Development for APD/OUPD “History of Racism in the United States” Class

Jackie explained that the course is complete and was due to begin on Monday, July 27. The spike in Covid-19 cases in Athens, however, forced postponement of the class. **Chief Pyle** said that one of his officers tested positive for the virus and **Chief Powers** said the class would be far less effective taught online than in-person. The class will likely begin as an in-person course at the start of the spring semester or during the first week of the summer break, depending on the course of the pandemic.

City Mask Ordinance Implementation

A long discussion about the local mask ordinance ensued. **Chief Pyle** explained that the law was written to make failure to wear a mask in public an administrative violation rather than a criminal violation. Tickets can be written for the violation only based on complaints. Complaints must be timely; complaints on social media are not useful. The police carry masks and will offer them to people who are not wearing a mask although police cannot force anyone to wear a mask. The police are, however, actively patrolling for mass gatherings that violate public health orders and have cited people for those particular violations.

MaryKathyrine asked about large, off-campus social gatherings during the pandemic and **Chief Pyle** said those are second-degree misdemeanors—far more significant a violation than a nuisance party. Police focus on citing the party hosts. But, **Chief Pyle** pointed out, there are loopholes in the ordinance. If six to eight people live together, they can all sit together on their front porch. **MaryKathyrine** asked how students are being informed about the public health ban on large social gatherings and **Chief Pyle** said that, although posters advertising the mask ordinance are all over town, there is no specific public relations campaign about the prohibition on large social gatherings. Police officers are simply talking directly to students.

Josh said that small business owners will be tweeting about the social gathering ban, particularly during the mid-August move-in. He noted that a police presence during move-in week will help. **Chief Pyle** explained that the last thing the APD wants to do is make arrests during a pandemic and that using “carrots, not sticks” will be the most effective approach to enforcing the gathering ban.

Chad asked about mask-wearing during student protests. **Chief Powers** explained that the prohibitions on mass social gatherings exempts first-amendment/political protest

gatherings, but those gatherings are not exempt from the statewide mask order. Failure to wear a mask in compliance with the state order is a second-degree misdemeanor.

Karen asked if students will be required to sign a pledge to wear masks and avoid parties. **Chad** said, yes, a pledge has been drafted but it is unclear how it will be enforced. The pledge is available here: <https://www.ohio.edu/coronavirus/ohio-pledge>.

Peter asked what the University is doing to protect everyone as students return to Athens. **Chad** pointed out that there will be free testing at Athens High School on August 7 from 1 to 6 pm and more pop-up testing stations to come, but the ability of OhioHealth to acquire tests is limited. **Chief Pyle** agreed that the Athens Department of Public Health would like to have more pop-up test sites but are at the mercy of test availability. **Chief Pyle** noted that 5,000-6,000 students will be returning in a few weeks, not 20,000. He predicted that socializing this smaller group of students to the new normal and its rules will be easier and that, if more students do return to Athens later, they will learn the rules from the students who have been here. **Karen** pointed out that students who are not moving here in August will likely come to visit their friends on the weekends. **Josh** noted that the entire community learned a lot from the Fourth of July episode that significantly increased the spread of the virus. Bar owners in particular want to make the return of students work, thus bar owners will be vigilant when students return. **Chief Pyle** is optimistic that students will rise to the occasion because July was a useful learning experience.

General Discussion

Ally asked about the visibility of police vehicles. **Chief Pyle** said both police departments have high-visibility vehicles. **Chief Powers** said all OUPD cars have contrasting colors and retro-reflective markings designed to comply with NHTSA guidelines.

Jackie recalled that at a previous meeting, **Chief Pyle** noted that all police officers are carefully screened before hiring and that the APD seeks to hire community-minded individuals. **Jackie** asked how community-minded individuals are identified. **Chief Pyle** explained the extensive testing and interviews conducted for each applicant, focusing on qualities such as empathy, respect, safety, and dedication. In hiring, the APD looks for people involved in, and serving, their community because officers' authority derives from the community they serve. **Chief Pyle** added that the APD has been fortunate in that the department has been able to be selective in its hiring. **Chief Powers** described the OUPD interview process. Each applicant is interviewed by three different stakeholder panels. The OUPD looks for open-minded people capable of viewing a situation from many perspectives. Each applicant also completes a comprehensive psychological assessment that includes a written test with similar questions asked in many different ways to verify applicants' honesty. Initial hiring is followed by 12 weeks of training during the probation period. **Chief Pyle** added that the APD seeks candidates who see the world in shades of gray rather than in black-white/right-wrong. "Inflexible people do not make good cops." **Chief Powers** observed that the hiring of police officers is more an art than a science.

MaryKathyrine asked if it was possible to distribute a leaflet to students to prevent illegal social gatherings. **Chief Powers** said OUPD is developing a website to share relevant policies related to use of force, accountability, and transparency. **Chief Pyle** said that that type of information is already online for the APD but they could also easily put the relevant

information in an FAQ to be distributed. **MaryKathyrine** said she would work on a leaflet for the next meeting.

Ally said that package theft was occurring on the West side and asked how landlords should advise tenants to keep packages safe. **Chief Pyle** said that the APD investigative unit was aware of the problem and that transients were responsible for the thefts. **Chief Powers** said there are safe boxes available for landlords to purchase and install. **Jackie** noted that in her neighborhood someone was going into mailboxes at night, so everyone in the neighborhood has learned to remove all mail and packages from the mailbox before dark.

Jackie noted that three of the four officers charged with George Floyd's murder are defending themselves by saying they were "just following orders." She asked how police departments can train officers to intervene if a superior is violating a law or departmental policy, or harming civilians. **Chief Pyle** said that the worst thing a department can do is fire someone for calling out another officer. At the APD, if the small violations are taken care of, the big violations tend to take care of themselves. If someone comes to work late, for example, they are disciplined. If someone fills out a false report, they are fired. The APD constantly develops training opportunities so that officers can think through what they would do given varied scenarios. **Chief Powers** noted that George Floyd's murder changed this conversation. His officers have said that they are now looking through a different lens at officers who intervene. Who was in the wrong may not be obvious until it's too late—as George Floyd's murder demonstrates. Police officers are now more likely to intervene when they see colleagues engaged in wrongdoing.

Kim asked if OUPD or APD have thought about hiring social workers. **Chief Powers** said the OUPD tried to engage the University's counseling and psychological services to assist them but that CPS was not amenable. Covid-19 has now put all potential changes on hold, but the OUPD continues to look into entering a partnership with Hopewell Health or University counseling and psychological services. **Chief Pyle** said the short answer currently is that the budget won't support hiring a social worker. But the APD does work consistently with crisis responders. **Chief Pyle** also noted that officers in both departments are heavily trained in providing assistance during mental health crises. **Peter** asked if the chiefs have thought about hiring Black mental health workers. **Chief Pyle** said it was something they would advocate for, but that they have no control over that process.

Peter asked if officers are taught that race and racism are part of the system. **Chief Powers** said yes. And that they hire officers who are able to view situations from others' perspectives. **Chief Pyle** explained that teaching that race and racism are part of the system is exactly what the APD and the OUPD want to formalize through the History of Racism in the United States course that will be required of all officers.

This was **Karen's** final JPAC meeting. She said her goodbyes and we thanked her for her years of service with the Council. We'll miss your voice Karen!

Peter described the 2020 21-Day Racial Equity and Social Justice Challenge to learn about systemic racism.

The annual BBQ has been cancelled due to Covid-19 and budgeting.

The next JPAC meeting will be held via Zoom on Thursday, September 3 from 5 to 6:30.