



Charlotte City Council
Safe Communities Committee
Meeting Summary
August 10, 2021

COMMITTEE AGENDA TOPICS

- I. Combatting Unsafe Speeding and Technology Solutions – Informational
- II. Violence Interrupter Program Update – Informational

COMMITTEE INFORMATION

Committee Members Present: Larken Egleston (Chair), Dimple Ajmera (Vice-Chair), Renee Johnson, Greg Phipps

Additional Council Members: Ed Driggs

Staff Resource: Emily Kunze, Assistant to the City Manager

Meeting Duration: 12:02 p.m. – 1:18 p.m.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Agenda
2. CMPD Speed Enforcement Update Presentation

DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

The meeting was called to order at 12:02 p.m., by Chairperson Larken Egleston. He explained that an August meeting was not planned. However, based on several Council discussions around unsafe speeding he thought it was a good idea to get an update. He also noted that Federico Rios was present to provide an update on the Violence Interrupter Program.

Combatting Unsafe Speeding and Technology Solutions

Major Dave Johnson discussed CMPD's enforcement activity, issues with past and present technology solutions and plans to address speeding in the future. Major Johnson reported that based on the investigation of 43 crashes resulting in 45 fatalities, 2021 is on track to meet or exceed the 81 traffic fatalities in 2020. Nationally, traffic fatalities were up 7% in 2020, but 12% in NC. In Mecklenburg County, 54 people died in cars speeding 20 miles over the speed limit in 2020. In the last 2 weeks CMPD has investigated 10 traffic fatalities and speed was a factor in seven of those. He stated that it is time to recognize speed related deaths as a public health crisis.

Major Johnson noted that during the pandemic lockdown there were less people on the roads. Additionally, several officers were redirected to address civil unrest in the City. The highways were turned into raceways, but now more people are returning to work and the streets are busier. Congestion and traffic engineering will assist in curbing some speeding. During the lockdown, traffic violation enforcements did not stop, but every ticket written contributes to the backlog of the cases at the courthouse. So far in 2021, CMPD has made over 47,000 traffic stops year to date. This represents a 31% increase over 2020 stops. The 47,000 traffic stops equate to 1,500 traffic stops per week conducted by CMPD.

The CMPD Transportation Unit consists of the Motorcycle Unit, the Major Crash Detectives and DWI Task Force Officers. They focus on the 30 high-injury network corridors that are a part of Charlotte's Vision Zero Plan. The 30 corridors are determined by CDOT, based on a formula that considers the number of serious motor vehicle accidents with injury, any accidents involving pedestrians and fatalities. They apply that to an algorithm and provide the corridors to CMPD to focus enforcement controls. At the Division level the complaints and traffic enforcement are driven by citizen complaints about speeding, stop sign violations or passing school buses. Major Johnson also stated that CMPD used to use traffic enforcement to combat violent crime, but they don't do that as much anymore to avoid casting too wide of a net.

CMPD usually does speed operations twice a week and DWI once a week and saturation patrols more often. A saturation patrol will flood the corridor in the high-injury network and look for any type of traffic infraction. He noted collaborations with other police/sheriff agencies to conduct speed enforcement operations in Charlotte. On May 20th they cited 121 violations, including 80 for speeding along I-485 in the Mallard Creek/Prosperity area. On May 24th, they conducted a border to border traffic operation along Interstate 74 near the Gaston County line. Gastonia police did traffic stops on their side. CMPD handed out 93 violations, including 51 for speeding. On July 15th, they conducted a nighttime traffic saturation patrol along several high injury network corridors in partnership with the Matthews Police Department. There were 130 violations, including 64 for speeding. Major Johnson noted that frequent and visible enforcement decreases and deters speeding.

If a citizen sees someone committing a traffic violation, they should report it to 911. Even though the officer may not arrive in time to witness the problem, the reporting would allow CMPD to track location and times to identify problem areas. CMPD uses radar speed signs to collect speed data throughout the day. In the early 2000s CMPD used speed vans to conduct traffic enforcement by cameras. The program was effective, however, they had to discontinue the program in 2006 because the legislation expired. Statutory challenges for using radar for speeding detection required an officer to be present to view the speeding. Additionally, the revenue received for the fines were not enough to support the program and provide the 90% required to be given to the school board. Red-light cameras had the same state statute issues.

Lt. Wally discussed future technology. He spoke about Artificial Intelligence as it applies to enforcement and management. It is similar to cameras being used on toll roads. It would verify individuals are wearing their seatbelts and speeding but would still require an officer to be present with the camera. It

is being used overseas right now. The Chair noted that allowing technology solutions or unsworn persons to assist with excessive speeding enforcement efforts, would minimize the number of negative interactions that have to take place between an officer and citizens, as well as allow officers to focus on the core components of their job. The Chair also stated that the needed changes will require collaboration and lobbying in Raleigh.

The State Legislature dictated that the City could only keep 10% of the Red-Light Camera system and the school system would get 90%. However, the percentage of revenue the City could keep did not cover the cost of maintaining the technology; the vendor was the only entity profiting off the program. Therefore, due to the lack of funding, the contract was not renewed. It was noted that running red lights is not an indicator of speeding, nor is it a major contributor to traffic fatalities.

North Carolina Cities that still use Red-Light Cameras are under contract and fulfilling their obligation to provide funding to their school systems. The police departments in those areas also have cost-sharing agreements with their school systems or special legislation for the camera program. Because CMPD could not identify the driver of the vehicle running the red light, the owner of the vehicle would receive the fine and no points were levied. Ms. Kunze suggested looking at a model similar to Wake County may be worth exploring. Chairperson Egleston emphasized that pursuance of the red-light camera authority is to make the streets safer, not to make a profit penalizing the community.

Violence Interrupter Program

Federico Rios, Director of the Office of Equity, Mobility and Immigrant Integration, presented an update on the Alternatives to Violence Initiative. He recapped the engagement with Cure Violence Global and steps taken within the last year. Belton Platt was selected as the site supervisor to manage violence interrupters along Beatties Ford Road. Mr. Platt has several positive relationships within the community, as well as a great deal of experience with the topic. Additionally, four other individuals were hired to work as violence interrupters and outreach workers. Both outreach workers will have caseloads of 15. An additional violence interrupter position still must be filled. Youth Advocate Programs is finding it a challenge to secure office space along the Beatties Ford Rd. corridor and are located 8 minutes away for the time being. Mr. Rios stated that they are hopeful that they will be in the corridor by October 1st. City staff have been part of the hiring panels.

Mr. Rios thanked Council for the approval to receive \$1.2M from Wells Fargo's Green Light Fund for the initiative. The funds will allow the City to fund two additional years of programming, network support, general capacity building, robust data collection and a future external evaluation of the entire initiative. He stated that the Cure Violence Global representatives stated that this is the first time they could recall that an initiative that is run through government was funded for more than one year.

Mr. Rios shared that the Queen City Festival would be hosted in the parking lot of Northwest School of the Arts on August 14th. The festival will serve as an opportunity to share information about the investment and connect with community members. There will be monthly events to connect with the community going forward.

Additional information was requested on the following items:

1. Share location of traffic enforcement activities with Councilmembers after the occurrence so that they can announce at their community meetings.
2. What is the rate of recidivism once a ticket has been issued for a violation?
3. Is there data for dismissals or prolonged cases?
4. The bandwidth limitation of the DA should be taken up with the Intergovernmental Relations since the funds come from the state level.
5. Can we use the data to identify a correlation with the backlog?
6. Provide a list of the 30 high-injury networks.
7. Does this need to go on the state legislative agenda?
8. Was there an impact on the number of accidents where red-light cameras were located (this may have allowed for the system to pay for itself)?
9. Can CDOT control the operation (delay in when the red-light changes)?
10. Invite CDOT to the next Safe Communities Committee meeting to respond to whether they can increase the delay at certain intersections as a traffic calming device.
11. Does the City have the authorization to implement a civil penalty or fine to owners if it was not a criminal infraction?
12. What is the cost of the red-light camera program and the revenue generated?
13. What steps need to be taken to get similar authority like Wake County?
14. Schedule an offline discussion with Councilmember Renee Johnson regarding the lack of office space in the Beatties Ford Road Corridor and possible collaborations to house Youth Advocate Programs.
15. Email to Committee members the Charlotte Observer's series of articles that provide data and anecdotal stories regarding excessive speeding on Charlotte roads.
16. Request that CDOT provide a list of priority intersections and information on their tools for traffic calming.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:18 p.m.