

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
CITY COUNCIL
INFORMATION SESSION
SEPTEMBER 1, 2016**

ATTENDANCE: Tom McCarthy, City Council President; Jeanette Herron, Scott Burns, AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia, Anthony Paoletto, Kathryn Bukovsky, Jose Casco, Milta Feliciano, Nessah Smith, Alfredo Castillo, Jack Banta, Denese Taylor-Moye, Aidee Nieves, Michelle Lyons, Eneida Martinez, Mary McBride-Lee

STAFF: Mayor, Joseph Ganim
Armando Perez, Chief of Police
Mark Straubel, Captain, Assistant to Chief of Police
Jason Amato, Sergeant, Gang Unit
Adam Radzimirski, Deputy Chief of Police
Tom Gaudett, Mayor's Office
Dan Roach, Mayor's Office
Gina Malheiro, Deputy CAO

OTHERS: Members of general public

CALL TO ORDER

President McCarthy called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM. He reviewed the procedures of the meeting to all those present.

AGENDA:

**AN INFORMATION SESSION TO DISCUSS PUBLIC SAFETY STRATEGIES WITH
POLICE CHIEF ARMANDO PEREZ**

President McCarthy began the discussion by briefly addressing the recent up-tick in gun violence which is occurring in Bridgeport, after which he turned the discussion over to the Mayor. Mayor Ganim stated that Governor Malloy had come down that morning to participate in discussion on this issue, the Mayor also stating that Chief Perez has been reaching out on the governmental level in regard to getting all the manpower support possible. The meeting involved local, state and federal law enforcement authorities and the purpose was to establish a game plan which would build upon Chief Perez's plan including the Troop G Commission. He continued that the plan must protect both residents and officers and talked about the two sides of having police visibility in the city, saying that sometimes visibility is appropriate, but at other times visibility is not the best approach, and mentioned the challenges which have been faced and met by the Gang Task Force in regard to visibility.

The Mayor then spoke about Project Longevity part which involves an exchange of communications amongst local authorities as a means of disseminating information, and he talked about the Executive Director of the Housing Authority reneging on his funding

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commitment from mid-March through August which, caused detail to be pulled back until September. He stated that in the past ten days the up-tick has been large and referenced the recent shooting in which 13 victims fell to gun violence.

The Mayor said that the Governor, that morning, had instructed the press that the meeting was a substantial one and not a photo-op. The Mayor then asked Chief Perez to redeploy the units and to keep the plan in place until there is new leadership at the Housing Authority.

Council Member Martinez said all that the Mayor had said was great, but she wanted to present information that she had regarding the escalation of gun violence. She stated that the present shootings go back to shootings from 2010 which are recycling where affiliations of victims take revenge for the prior shootings and the situation has escalated to where it is today. She said it is good that the State Police are coming to Bridgeport, but her concern was that they are not as trained and capable as the Bridgeport Police Department in fulfilling the needs of the city. Mayor Ganim said he understood Council Member Martinez's concern and said that it is not going to be the pairing they've done in the past, but will be more of visible participation in which they will be trained. He said there will be more vehicle stops sometimes focusing on on/off ramps, visible disruptions of traffic and other things behind the scenes.

Council Member Martinez returned to the topic of Project Longevity and how it was producing results, but then fell through the cracks and there was a gap in its implementation. She mentioned other organizations that mimic Project Longevity, stating that she would like to see the project re-implemented and said she had to give Deputy Chief Murphy credit because he ran a tight ship, but she said that since Charlie Grady has left, it has fallen apart. The Mayor said that Bridgeport is making a concerted effort to work with governmental authorities to continue programs like Project Longevity, and that and that the number of meetings on these issues will be increased. Council Member Martinez asked what the game plan is. She reported that there were two shootings in her neighborhood at 7:35 AM when kids are walking to school. She further commented that the Housing Authority had stiffed the Police Department, because all these police were put out there and they robbed the Police Department. Council Member Martinez also wanted to know about the game plan for situations like the one on Hollister and Stratford Avenue where kids walking to school have to stumble over alcoholics on the street.

Council Member Lyons commented that the traffic stop plan is good as, on her way to the meeting, she saw four youth in a car, swerving and driving dangerously, and she believes that officers visible on the street causes respect and brings a feeling of safety to kids. Council Member Taylor-Moye agreed with Council Member Martinez about the excellence of the Police Department. She continued that, the people from 2010, are trying to recruit the young people to continue the cycle. She supports the plan that will nip this in the bud, otherwise she feels everyone will feel unsafe. She said kids are making reckless decisions in that they carrying weapons, not just to have, but to use them. Council Member McBride-Lee commented that she too would like to applaud the Police Department, admitting that she did not used to trust the Police Department. She said there are a lot of shootings at Trumbull Gardens and she is happy that the police will be there. Council Member McBride-Lee added that the churches have an ear for people and that they need to start preaching in the churches. She provided an example of this when she had her own church and there were guys selling drugs on the corner, but the presence of the church brought an amount of respect which caused the guys to move their operation. She added that the church is able to respect parents and gang-bangers alike and she extolled the importance of community policing.

Mayor Ganim left the meeting at 6:35.

President McCarthy then turned the discussion over to Chief Perez.

Chief Perez thanked the Council for having him there, and he began by saying that through June and July, things were going really well until the Housing Authority stiffed the Police Department. It did not take the gang members long to figure out that the police presence was gone, adding that they were down 101 police officers. He then addressed the third factor in the escalation of the recent gun violence which involves gang members being present in the courtroom where shooters were being tried. He said that the gang members are there to let the jury know they were being observed and, thereby, intimidating the jury and to impacting the judicial process. He said identified shooters have simply been acquitted by the jury with the witnesses being targeted shortly thereafter. Chief Perez provided several examples of this occurrence and retold the events in each case which had led up to good witnesses being killed for their testimony.

Council Member Lyons asked whether the jury is from Bridgeport to which the Chief answered that it is a Fairfield County jury. Council Member Lyons was trying to find out if there is any way around this jury intimidation in the Bridgeport courtroom to which the Chief answered that all jury members have to come to Bridgeport. Chief Perez said that he has spoken to John Smyriga, State's Attorney, who is willing to work with the Bridgeport Police Department, although he added that Attorney Smyriga is not going to come out and say what the Chief had laid out about the jury intimidation. Chief Perez said that he had also sought out the U.S. Attorney who he said was great, adding that the previous night, there had been a meeting of FBI agents, Bridgeport Narcotics, Sergeant Amato, ATF, and the State Attorney's Office who are all working together to go back to 1995 when the feds played a more active role in Bridgeport. He said he wants to put the bad people in front of grand juries and lock them up for a long time. He referred again to the "hiccup" in Project Longevity where officers were not getting paid, and explained this lapse in the program as having to do with the change in administration in Bridgeport. He said that the officers are out there now doing a great job and that the Police Department "got it done". The Chief referenced the front page story from Connecticut Post from that morning which reported on the collusion of enforcement agencies which are bring brought together to address the gun violence problem, stating that the sole purpose of the Police Department is to serve and protect the public.

Chief Perez turned the discussion over to Sergeant Amato.

Sergeant Amato began with some history about his role in the Police Department. He said he started in 2010 as part of the community policing unit, and from there, he is running the Gang Unit with four other officers. He explained that Bridgeport's gangs are not like the other Connecticut cities in that they are actually just groups of kids which control a specific area of the city. He said they do not wear colors or who can be visually identified, but instead base themselves on the level of violence of which they are capable. They have access to guns and cover the entire city. He said that his unit goes out every day to get to know the kids, stating that where the system is falling apart is at the Judicial Department level which is raising the juvenile age, and which has legalized marijuana. He stated that the kids identify themselves by their area of the City and that the kids on the streets know the rules of law enforcement in terms of which crimes carry a higher or lower penalty, and the kids proceed accordingly. He provided the example of what the kids call an "f*** you shot" which is a shot beneath the waist that carries a lower penalty than the penalty of shooting above the waist which is legally considered "shooting

to kill”. The purpose of the shot beneath the waist shot is to “teach a lesson.”

Sergeant Amato said there is no structure in the Bridgeport gangs in that there are no leaders to approach, so his unit has to approach each kid individually. As far as gang members doing time in prison and then returning to the neighborhood to be of potential help in the fight against crime, Sergeant Amato said that these returning gang members cannot help because the kids do not respect them.

Council Member Lyons commented that it is very important to have this meeting, stressing also the importance of communicating with the Council members as to what is happening, so that the Council members and their constituents can be informed regarding events which might affect their safety. She referred to the house on Thorne Street as the perfect example of why staying informed is important, mentioning also a house in Black Rock used for drugs, saying that when they have to abandon one location, the gang members just go somewhere else and hide, and that this is spreading. She stated that there are families coming from New York City who are not do not about safety issues in Bridgeport, and she wants to keep them informed. She said she had been through the 1990s and 2010, but that this is different. Council Member Martinez stated that she has an excellent rapport with Jason and commended his diligent work on the East End which is now cleaned up, the kids are off the streets and they are petrified of Sergeant Amato.

Sergeant Amato addressed the use of the word “gang”, but he first acknowledged the police officers sitting behind him, saying that, although he is the face of community policing, the whole department works together on community policing goals. Sergeant Amato stated that the word, “gang” is not used anymore as it is perceived negatively by the person the officer is trying to talk to, and can lead to a shut-down of the interview by the interviewee and no information will be obtained. Therefore, he said, the word being used now is “group”, as in groups or group members. He continued that said there are 349 police officers for 150,000 people in Bridgeport and stated his belief that, if neighbors want to get involved, they can clean up anything. He said the Police Department can clean up anything as long as they know what is going on through confidential communication with residents.

President McCarthy interjected that he used to get daily a communications report, but then it disappeared. Captain Straubel added that the ball was dropped on communications, and that he will talk to Scott Applebee about a future communications plan, adding that President McCarthy has been nice enough to sort through the messages and make appropriate notification to the Council member in the event of a police situation in their district. He continued that President McCarthy will be taking the police calls throughout the night and early morning and will make the notifications, adding that Chief Perez and himself are always available to the Council members. President McCarthy called the attention of the Council members to the emails they get from him during the day about the emergency alerts he receives, saying that the problem with that was that, when the work day ended, so did the emergency alerts he received. He stated that the easiest answer for the moment is for him to inform the members and they would make changes to this as necessary going forward. Council Member Herron commented that there is presently a press person who is getting paid and who she believes is also getting those emergency calls, and she asked why that press person is not doing the notifying to Council members. She said that this might have to be looked into. President McCarthy asked Council Member Herron to refer that kind of questions to the administration to which she said she would. Mr. Roach said that there had been some weak spots in the notifying process, but that the person should continue the notification and he would look into it. Council Member Herron said that

there is another person working him, but apparently they said they had had computer problems. President McCarthy interjected that he firmly believes in the idea of a Public Safety Information Officer. Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia commented that the notifications should be across the board rather than to a member of a specific district, saying that all of the members are in many different parts of the city during the day and may be affected by a situation in the area where they work, for example, but would not receive the notification because it was not in the member's district. She felt that this is a little unfair. She also asked about who the members contact and what the protocol or chain-of-command is in the event that a member should want to ask a question. She would like to have a list of chain-of-command and who to contact, citing the example of a member sending an email and not receiving a response and needing to know who then to contact. President McCarthy stated that he relies on Captain Straubel. Captain Straubel told the Council that one of best avenues is to call the Communication Supervisor directly at 203/576-7823, and although this individual is not a police officer, they do have training, they oversee the call-takers and dispatchers, and will possess an intimate knowledge of who is on, who is in charge, which lieutenant is working that night. Captain Straubel said that this individual would have access to information far in excess of that of Chief Perez's or his, since the situation would be evolving at the time of the call and that the Chief and himself would be doing the same thing the members would be doing, i.e. trying to get information. Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia remarked that additional training might be in order for the civilian emergency procedure because she said she had once called in an public/fire safety emergency situation and it took them 12 hours to send out an officer. She said she did not want to make a scene because it was taken care of, but she said it bothered her afterwards. Captain Straubel said he understood completely and that the average response-time for arriving on a scene should be about 2-3 minutes, and he stressed again the importance of directly contacting the Communication Supervisor in the event a constituent pressing problem and has reached a call-taker. This gives the Council member the ability to reach right out to the Supervisor who will at least provide an answer in light of that officers are dealing with at that moment. Complaints about call-takers can also be made to the Supervisor. Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that at times when she has called, she usually uses just her name without her title, but once she used her title, Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia, and it was joked about that she thought she was going to get special treatment. Captain Straubel said that is under negotiation for the Chiefs of both Police and Fire to be included in the civilian emergency procedure. Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia restated the need for a list for the Council members to also include things like shift-changes, daily schedules, etc. Council Member McBride-Lee commented that she would like to continue receiving emails and that she wants to know about situations at the time and not afterward. Council Member Taylor-Moye asked if there are more being put out in regard to intervention to which Chief Perez said that he was going to talk about that, but firsts wanted to introduce Deputy Radzimirski to talk about Project Longevity.

Deputy Radzimirski came forward, thanked the members, and introduced himself as being in charge of Investigative Services with one of his tasks is Law Enforcement Coordinator for a strategy used in Bridgeport as well as all over the country. Here in Connecticut it is called Project Longevity. This strategy is evidence-based and is the brain-child of Dr. David Kennedy, formerly from Harvard and now at John Jay College in New York. The project first started out in Boston in the 1990s and used a group-focused effort to combat homicides and violence. It involved identifying the people involved in gun violence, referring to Sergeant Amato as a big part of this outreach in Bridgeport to members of groups, and its goal is to send a message which has two aspects:

- **The Carrot**
This aspect of the message asks the people involved to put down the guns because they can be valuable members of the community, but they have become a detriment to the community. As implemented in Bridgeport, the message to group members is that they can receive help with whatever their needs are, e.g. substance abuse, housing, education, work training. They are told that there are people already set up in Bridgeport to provide help to those who turn themselves around and take advantage of the opportunities that have been set up for them.
- **The Stick**
This aspect of message describes the law enforcement part where the first group that kills someone will receive the full attention of the law. As implemented in Bridgeport, this includes the DEA, FBI, ATF, Gang Task Force and which goes after the shooter and every other member of the group for the “little stuff”, e.g. jay walking, back child-support, parking tickets, outstanding warrants, and has produced a steady decline in number of homicides and group member recruits.

Deputy Radzimirski acknowledged the recent outbreak of gun violence in Bridgeport, with two shootings in close proximity to each other and one that was very horrific and cannot be minimized, but he said that, if looked at objectively, it is an anomaly. He said that the trend, since the beginning of the project, has shown a steady decline in gun violence and in group member shootings, and that they would weather the storm and are not going to throw the baby out with the bath water. He said he is sure that with the partnership with the Governor, the federal and state authorities, Bridgeport will get through this and continue its success.

Deputy Radzimirski said that the overall message of Project Longevity is, “We want to help you. It's not all about locking you up”. He described the process of Custom Notifications which function as an outreach to people who may not have heard this message of help, such as people on probation or parole who have to comply with the request by the Police Department to attend a meeting, and who then hear the message of the help they can receive. There also outreach into the community to active group members who are not on probation or parole, but who need to hear the message via an unofficial letter from their community officer regarding the message. Deputy Radzimirski said the intervention also reaches into the jails by meeting with group members three months before they are released and then again one month before to deliver the message of support.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked how about the connection between Project Longevity and her as a Council member. Deputy Radzimirski then explained the two parts of the project, i.e. the service side - the carrot, and the law enforcement side- the stick. He noted that Harold Dimbo is the Project Manager of the service side who is primarily involved with community outreach, e.g. outreach to businesses to try to find jobs, managing a small office of case managers, intake workers. Deputy Radzimirski said that the service side also goes out with the officers when they do their custom notifications, mentioning Edgardo Soberal, a case worker, who accompanies Sergeant Phil Sharpe in delivering the message.

Council Member Feliciano said that she had met someone from Street Safe and wanted to know how the Police Department is connecting with Street Safe. Deputy Radzimirski stated that there is a delicate relationship in that Street Safe acts as violence interrupters and they know what is happening on the street, and they try to shut down retaliation. Council Member Feliciano asked

whether Street Safe works with the police to which Deputy Radzimirski answered that Street Safe cannot be seen as an arm of the Police Department as it is dangerous for them. Street Safe does not depend on the group members for information, even though they get some information from them, but it is not their charge to bring the perpetrator to justice. Council Member Taylor-Moye asked whether the Police Department works with any other crime-prevention organizations to which Deputy Radzimirski responded in the affirmative and provided examples. He said they work closely with YANA which is part of the call-in. The call-in has a law enforcement message and a community message. For the law enforcement, the presenters are Chief of Police, followed by Deputy Radzimirski, then State's Attorney, John Smyriga, then a U.S. Attorney speaks about the stark differences between the federal and state systems. He said there are other voices, e.g. Voice of Redemption, Voice of Pain and Moral Voice which represents the community, service providers, stating that they work with quite a few agencies.

President McCarthy asked Chief Perez if he had anything further to discuss to which Chief Perez stated he wanted to bring the Council up-to-date on what they are doing. He said he got together with his deputy chiefs, his narcotics officers, FBI task officers, Jason and Gang Unit and they came up with a plan. He stated he has taken "mounted" off the shelf and has assigned them to Green Homes from 8-4, and got permission to use SRO officers after school at Trumbull Gardens, and that he uses two officers, Nick Ortiz and Roger Reed there also. VCI has taken over Marina Village and is shutting things down pretty well, making traffic stops, and not leaving, but staying there as a presence. In PT, he has officers going there who are not officially assigned there, but who go there. For the 4 PM - 12 AM hours, Chief Perez said that the gang unit, the task force, narcotics officers all work together to cover the entire city and have a common focus on specific individuals who they want to present to a federal prosecutor who will, in turn, present them to a grand jury. He said this is going to be a game-changer, i.e. focusing on specific, violent individuals. He mentioned a certain house that they are watching which will, hopefully, bring in good information and individuals who can be put in front of a grand jury.

Council Taylor-Moye voiced concern about the people being targeted moving from location to another and finding out the police's routine. Chief Perez stated that all the housing projects receive three shifts of coverage by officers to which Council Taylor-Moye referenced a similar plan in New York which ended up backfiring and the situation made things worse and they had to come up something else. Chief Perez assured Council Taylor-Moye that the Police Department has come up with some pretty good things, and that the best aspect of the plan is that the feds on the Department's side. He said that, once things gets rolling, a change will be seen and that he wants to fix the problem, not band-aid it, and he reiterated all the law enforcement resources, state and federal, that are being brought to bear on the gun violence in Bridgeport.

Council Member Lyons returned to her previous comments about the swerving, dangerous car she encountered earlier that day, and suggested the possibility of police presence at high-volume intersections such as the one where she saw the car. She also wanted to know if Chief Perez had any up-date on the Blackham School situation where the kid was beaten up. Chief Perez stated he would talk to Council Member Lyons later about that, adding that he will have people out there watching the kids.

Council Member Martinez asked Chief Perez about the plan for the four officers who are parked at the Quad to which Chief Perez stated that it has already been cut and that it was taking a lot of money. Council Member Martinez asked Chief Perez whether the Swat Team participates out in the community to which Chief Perez said that it is a collateral duty and they respond when they

get called.

Council Member McBride-Lee stated her belief that the recent craziness is a result of the court verdicts which have empowered the groups to feel they can get away with jury intimidation. A general discussion about various aspects of jury intimidation followed.

Council Member Nieves commented that Chief Perez is doing a really good job cleaning the drug traffic on the East Side, and then referenced anti-gang funding grants in the past which have helped law enforcement, such as the one for the Hollow. She talked about the immediate flow of social media information regarding shootings and how the Police Department can be in touch with that constant movement of information. Chief Perez said that they could be there for six months in order for him to fully address Council Member Nieves' comments, but said that is not an excuse. He said that they are pursuing grants, that Danny is helping them out, and that he has requested a position be created where someone is hired solely to take care of grants.

Council Member Martinez wanted to commend LT. Grech who works on the East Side and talked a past situation where drunks on Stratford and Hollister Avenue were harassing mothers walking their children to school, exposing themselves and being nasty. Council Member Herron added that she had put the call in and the officers responded immediately. She said the drunks were following the women to their homes and it was really bad. Council Member Martinez again commended LT. Grech on his work and effort.

President McCarthy asked that the Council members thank Chief Perez which they all did, applauding.

The meeting ended at 8:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Nerina Kagan
Telesco Secretarial Services