



**PUBLIC SAFETY COMMISSION
MINUTES**

**REGULAR MEETING
Monday, August 3, 2020**

The Public Safety Commission convened a videoconferencing meeting Monday, August 3, 2020 at City Hall 301 W. 2nd Street in Austin, Texas.

Commissioner Webber called the Board Meeting to order at 3:00p.m.

Board Members in Attendance:

Rebecca Webber
Daniela Nunez
Rebeca Bernhardt
Rebecca Gonzales
Selena Alvarenga

William (Bill) Kelly
Kathleen Hausenfluck
Rocky Lane

Board Members Absent: Chris Harris

Staff in Attendance:

Troy Gay, Chief of Staff, Austin Police Department
Rob Vires, Chief of Staff, Austin Fire Department
Jasper Brown, Chief of Staff, Austin Travis County Emergency Medical Services

- 1. Approval of Minutes – Commissioner Webber asked for comments/edits of the June 1, 2020, minutes. Hearing no edits or corrections to the minutes, Commissioner Webber deemed the minutes approved.**

Citizens Communications - Citizens signed up to speak on agenda items only:

- **Cary Roberts with Greater Austin Crime Commission** – spoke in favor of reform within Austin Police Department, but not in support of reducing APD’s FY20/21 budget or reducing the number of police officers.
- **Cole Cuno, Policy Analyst with Greater Austin Crime Commission** – commented on methodology being used to justify police staffing reductions at Austin Police Department. He was not in favor of reducing APD’s staff

2. Introduction of the Public Safety Committee – speaker Council Member Flannigan, District 6

Commissioner Webber introduced the Council Member and explained how and why this topic was added to the agenda. A memo from Commissioner Harris and Webber was emailed to the Public Safety Committee suggesting that maybe the Public Safety Commission should be abandoned due to the recent establishment of the Public Safety Committee. Council Member Flannigan shared his thoughts on what the roles of each group are, and the benefit both groups could bring to the City of Austin when working/collaborating together.

- Role of Public Safety Committee functions to oversee implementation of council adopted policy/directions from council.
- Role of Public Safety Commission as a place for additional public input that the Public Safety Committee does not get; unless the Commission shares/provides an update
- A goal is to see the Committee and Commission coordinate scheduling/collaborating to work on issues coming up in future council meetings. The Commission could say to the Committee based on citizens input you might want to start working on this issue or topic and Committee alerts Commission to some future thoughts/topics council is interested in addressing.

There were comments and questions from board members Kelly, Webber, Nunez and Alvarenga. Oversight and communication of work/action taken by the Public Safety Commission to the City Council members was a major topic of discussion. **Council Member Flannigan** commented his thought of the Public Safety Commission as being first in alerting the Council to topics from citizens communication/input, Council adds some agenda items based on information from Commission's citizens communication and Council's actions i.e. resolution, ordinance, etc.. gets forwarded to the Public Safety Committee to oversee the implementation of the tasks listed in the resolution.

Commissioner Webber paused the agenda to take a moment to introduce two new members to the Public Safety Commission board.

- Rocky Lane** was the latest confirmed commissioner. He introduced himself and shared a little about himself and his background.
- Nelly Ramirez** has not completed all necessary training to begin serving as a voting commissioner, and was officially observing today's meeting.

3. Domestic violence reports during the pandemic – Commissioner Nunez introduced this item and a list of questions had been forwarded to Julianna Gonzales, SAFE Alliance Director to assist her in preparing a responsive presentation. **Julianna Gonzales**, Director at SAFE Alliance which is a local non-profit for dealing with family violence; and **Quinisha Simmons**, Family Shelter Director at SAFE Alliance, where she manages the day to day needs for all families coming into the shelter presented to the board.

Julianna Gonzales began the presentation by reminding everyone that family violence is a pandemic of its own, however in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic there are significant impacts to residents of Austin due to the quarantine such as:

- People who are afraid to go home because the abuser is now home 24/7 as a result of the quarantine

- People who need to go to the hospital but won't because of the fear of contracting COVID-19
- Lots of stress among survivors of domestic violence who are unable to leave the shelter
- Hotline has received more calls from April to June 2020 than last year 2019 same months
- Lots of rescheduling of admissions appointments due to victims having to try to find a safe time to exit the home.
- Bridge to Safety Program has been a help, it is designed to provide one time assistance to families in need/crisis.
- Sexual assault exams are lower than usual at this time of year at the Heloise House.

Julianna commented there are people needing different types of help at the shelter 7 days a week.

There was questions and discussions from the Commissioners Lane and Alvarenga concerning if people were ever turned away from the shelter due to lack of funding and Commissioner Lang asked if there was any continuing education for staff and volunteers. Julianna left the number for those in need of resources to call. The number is 1-800-267-SAFE

4. City of Austin Fiscal Year 2020-2021 Proposed Budget – Commissioner Webber introduced the item and called for comments from Selena Xie, President of EMS Employee Association who was not linked into the meeting at the time. Chief of Staff, Jasper Brown was asked to speak on items the EMS received and did not receive in the proposed budget.

Per, Jasper Brown EMS did receive funding for Del Valle (7 paramedics, personnel and equipment medics operating in Del Valle). and two additional 24hour ambulances along with funding for adding commanders. EMS did not receive the funding requested for additional admins and commented that EMS needs the back end staff to support the front end staff EMS did receive funding for. Commissioner Lane asked if there was ever a case of where all three public safety departments worked together outside of 911 calls. COS Brown responded and commented on some of the areas where all three departments respond to a call/ work together outside of a 911call. Special Events, HOST, Flood responses, and community education are some of the areas where all three Public Safety departments work together. Commissioner Lane was also interested in who determines who will be the lead when all three departments respond.

Selena Xie thanked the Public Safety Commission for their support with budget recommendations to council on behalf of EMS. We were disappointed that we did not get the ambulance, and thankful to Council Member Alter for her amendment to the budget so that any additional funding that may be become available should go to EMS to get another ambulance in 2021. The additional ambulance is desperately needed in the central core of Austin. The City Manager's choice not to provide a second ambulance has certainly caused for employee morale to be low. EMS staff wanted the two ambulances to serve the community better. **Commissioner Nunez** inquired about the previous EMS budget and asked if the Paramedic consult line would help with calls (like coordinate doctors' visits or getting prescriptions) without having to have an ambulance ride to the hospital to receive these services.

Austin Police Department Budget FY20/21- Commissioner Webber opened the discussion with her position of being in favor of Council Member Flannigan’s plan to decentralization policing and efforts to reduce systemic problems. Under Council Member Flannigan’s plan, APD would be broken into specialized units. Specialized departments would be created to handle some of the departments that are currently under Austin Police Department and create more transparency. Reallocation of the Communications department is one change that is being considered.

Commissioners Lane, Kelly, Nelly, Nunez, Hausenfluck and Webber had comments on the changes expected to take place within APD. **Commissioner Kelly** cautioned the board about supporting a fundamental path for change that does not include evidence based data, and reminded the commissioners “this is not a Trump Administration” and the board can look at the sciences when advocating for change within Austin Police Department.

Austin Fire Department Budget FY20/21 – Rob Vires, Chief of Staff, AFD responded to Commissioner Webbers request for their status of items received in the FY20/21 budget. COS, Vires shared the AFD received approval of the WUI (Wildland Urban Interface) Code Adoption and funding for staff and admins to support the program and funding for cadet classes. Per Chief of Staff Vires, the adoption of the WUI Code is a tremendous value to the City of Austin.

5. Election of Chair for Public Safety Commission – prior to accepting nominations for Chair, Rebecca Webber read into the records a statement from former Public Safety Chair Meghan Hollis. The former chair resigned from the board because of her new employment created a conflict of interest for her to continue to serve on the board. She thanked the board for welcoming her to the group. Rebecca Webber emailed a copy of her resignation letter to all of the board members.

Commissioner Webber nominated Commissioner Rebecca Gonzales as the new Chair and Commissioner Lane seconded the nomination.

The floor was opened for other nominations and there were none; Webber asked for any discussion on the nomination hearing no discussion, she called for the vote.

Roll call:

Nunez-yes
Hausenfluck-yes
Lane-yes
Bernhardt- yes
Kelly- yes
Alvarenga –yes
Webber – yes
Gonzales – yes

Vote: Unanimous

Absent: Commissioner Harris

Abstain: zero

6. Future Agenda Items – Commissioner Webber asked members to please use the form on Public Safety Commission website to submit requests for future agenda items.

Adjourn @ 5pm