

Public Safety Committee Members Present: Larry Bradley, Chairman
 Lee Malcom
 David Dickinson

Those Absent: Charles Boyce

Staff Present: John Howard
 Logan Propes
 Debbie Kirk
 Chris Bailey
 Andrew Dykes
 R.V. Watts
 Matt McClung
 Beth Thompson
 Paul Rosenthal

Visitors: Dianne Wilson
 Susan Walker
 Kim Jolly
 Tara Polson
 Michelle Mirolli
 Kelli Herrington
 Mary Knotts
 Tommy Fountain, Sr.
 Shauna Mathias
 Clayton Mathias
 Mark Albury
 Jason Sams
 Julie Sams
 Chris Conner
 Mandy Williams
 Catherine Holbrook
 Jimmy Holbrook

I. CALL TO ORDER – Chairman Larry Bradley

1. Roll Call

Chairman Bradley noted that all Committee Members were present, except Committee Member Charles Boyce. There was a quorum.

2. Approval of Agenda

To approve the agenda as presented.

*Motion by Malcom, seconded by Dickinson.
 Passed Unanimously.*

II. MATTERS BEFORE COMMITTEE

1. General Discussion

Chairman Larry Bradley discussed correspondence he received in July and concerns from the citizen that spoke at the Council Meeting last month. This Committee Meeting is to discuss these issues and get ideas or continued improvement. He requested for Chief Watts to

explain the recent promotions in his department.

Chief R.V. Watts introduced and recognized his Command Staff. Major Matt McClung has been with the City of Monroe Police Department for the last 20 years and has served in several capacities; he has been in law enforcement for 23 years. Captain Brent Davis has been with the department for 9 years and has a total of 17 years of experience in law enforcement; he is taking over as the SWAT Team Commander. Captain John Pilgrim has been a captain for three years, has been with the department for 16 years, and has a total of 25 years of law enforcement experience. Captain Tracy Hanson was born and raised in Monroe. She has gotten her Master's Degree through Columbus State Command College and will be going to the FBI Academy in January. He introduced his Administrative Assistant Mary Knotts, who has been with the department for 7 years, and Pastor Tommy Fountain from the 1025 Church. He explained that Pastor Fountain serves as one of the Chaplains for the Police Department.

Chairman Bradley stated there are three areas that he has heard concerns about: traffic enforcement and speeding, crimes against property and people, and Code cleanup for areas that are less than desirable and need improvement. He questioned whether anyone in the public would like to make any comments.

Ms. Dianne Wilson, of 701 Davis Street, stated she has come before Council several times. She thanked Mr. Spears and Mr. Bradley; she has seen a few changes taking place after he became a Marshal. She discussed the shooting at the corner of Pine Park and Davis Street that took place on July 4, and a gentleman that had rocks thrown at his truck. She stated a guy pulled up to the curb to question whether the noise from their music bothers her. She did not feel comfortable answering the question truthfully and was afraid of retaliation. Ms. Wilson stated she does not understand how slum lords can get away with having property and not taking care of it without something being done. She has put her house up for sale but is having trouble selling it. She thinks that the City could do something to make the slum lords cleanup their property; she has made recordings from her back steps of the music that she has to listen to.

City Administrator Logan Propes stated the City now has three fulltime Marshals, who are doing daily reporting. They have written 424 Repair Cleanup Notices since June 27. He explained that Georgia has very strong property rights. The landlords have a vested interest in the law. The City has to enforce the Codes; the Marshals have plenty of provisions to go after, without adding any new laws locally. He has given instructions for the Code Department to be aggressive with enforcement, but everyone will be treated equally. They are making more headway; Davis Street has been hit pretty hard. It will take a concerted effort by staff to stay on top of the issues, but progress is being made. He explained the three Marshals are making rotations around the City, but they cannot be everywhere all the time. There is a lot that can be seen from the street that can be written up according to local ordinances, such as a hole in a roof. The City cannot make entry without some probable cause. In Georgia, the tenant or landlord would have to allow Code Enforcement or the Police to come inside. They generally will not allow them inside, due to the fear of being displaced. He stated the Georgia Supreme Court will not allow Cities to do utility inspections between renters. They are doing everything they can while still abiding by Georgia State Laws. Mr. Propes discussed the process; if there is something small the Marshal will talk to them face to face. The first piece of paper received will be a Repair Cleanup Notice, and they have 14 days to comply. If the 14-day provision is not met they will get a citation, which will take them to Municipal Court where it will be adjudicated. He stated it is a long process and not a quick fix; reports can be made with the City Marshals in

the Code Enforcement Office.

City Attorney Paul Rosenthal explained one of the biggest struggles when a property ends up in Municipal Court for being in complete derelict conditions is trying to locate the owners themselves. They have several that they are trying to file nuisance actions against in Municipal Court. He stated a lot of times the really bad unoccupied parcels have ownership issues. They are currently working on a property that has been foreclosed on by a bank that is located out of state.

Council Member David Dickinson stated that he has lived on Church Street for 40 years. They encountered some of the same issues as Davis Street when they first moved there, and people questioned why they would want to move into that neighborhood. He stated that the key is not giving up and not letting those kinds of things run them out of their community. There is no place that is totally safe and immune from that type of conduct. Council discussed some of these types of issues at the retreat a couple of weeks ago. There are problems with housing that is not right and numerous Code violations, but that does not automatically equate to criminal conduct. He believes the City needs to collectively send a message that criminals are not welcome here, and that behavior will not be tolerated in Monroe. Mr. Dickinson owns two properties on Davis Street. He received citations for two of his properties for the grass being too high, so he cut the grass. It is the criminal conduct that has to be stopped, and the slumlords need to clean up their rental properties. He and Rita are moving into 509 Davis Street; he is going to make the warehouse at 511 Davis Street his garage for restoring cars. The Police Department needs to have a presence on the streets back there, not just driving in their vehicles, because criminals don't like to see policemen. He discussed people not abiding by the speed tables. He stated that these problems have to be fought every day, but people can not give up.

Council Member Lee Malcom stated that she agrees with everything that has been said tonight; this has been an ongoing problem. She feels the City now has more patrol officers available to help with these issues. The City is constantly trying to find funding within the budget to increase the police force, and it is going to have to be put as a priority in the next budget. The number of officers is seriously going to have to be looked at in order to have a consistent presence on the streets. She stated increasing the force is the only way to make an impact.

Chief Watts stated the officers removed 138 guns from the streets in the City of Monroe in 2020, 109 guns in 2021, and 49 guns have been taken off of the streets so far in 2022. Twenty of the guns from this year were taken from Davis Street. He explained that his vehicle was shot up in his driveway, and his house was shot up with his family inside. The City has an excellent police force that is actively patrolling the streets on a regular basis. There will be more issues as the City continues to grow. He discussed actively trying to mentor people in that area. The cycle has to be broken, which will require consistent involvement. There was a 17-year-old shot in the leg in Tanglewood Sunday night; they were able to bring a suspect into custody. He stated they have built some really good relationships in those communities, but the individuals cannot let it be known that they are communicating with law enforcement, due to fear of retaliation. He explained these have been problem areas for more than 20 years, and they continue to look for better ways to make the greatest impact.

Chairman Bradley stated that cameras were recently put up at the entrances and exits to the City, per suggestion from Chief Watts.

Chief Watts explained that the camera implementation has not been promoted a lot, due to not giving away tactics for effectively making arrests. There have been 16 Flock cameras implemented, which are tag readers. The cameras keep data on all the vehicles coming into and out of the City; they have been crucial in investigating crimes. The information can be put into the GCIC System. He discussed examples of the surrounding counties using the same equipment so that all of the information gets shared with other agencies. He stated that it is an effective tool; there were 17,000 hits between July 1 and August 1. The Criminal Investigation Division recently implemented the Gray Key System, which is a tool to effectively extract data from cell phones.

Ms. Catherine Holbrook, of 612 East Church Street, stated her family moved to Monroe about six years ago. They are excited about the direction the City has taken and the growth that has occurred. It seems like the crime in their area has only continued to increase, and they find themselves more and more concerned about safety. She discussed gunshots being fired a few years ago at the Community Center Building, which is two doors down from their house. Their neighbors had someone crash through their fence into their porch, due to a bullet wound; they also had a stray bullet fly into their home. Another neighbor discovered shell casings in the street and a bullet hole in his company van. They hear gunshots coming from the streets behind them; they consistently hear drag racing and burn outs. Things have been stolen and cars have been broken into while in their driveways. They see what are possibly drug deals happening at the park. They would love to see an increased police presence in their area to decrease the crime and improve the safety for the community. Recent events have put the quality of life that Monroe has been able to provide in doubt.

Chief Watts stated anyone that thinks they may have seen a drug deal should call 911 immediately to report the suspicious activity. He stated the key is communication; he recommended for everyone to get business cards with phone numbers from his staff before leaving tonight.

Chairman Bradley discussed the increase in traffic, which has caused an increase in the amount of speeding. He and Chief Watts have been discussing enforcement tools for speeding. The City will continue to put some of the speed control devices and elements on the streets to slow the traffic down. He explained there have been as many complaints as anything else concerning the islands installed on Church Street. The goal was to slow the traffic down and limit the number of trucks coming through, and that goal was accomplished. It is not perfect, but it accomplished the goal overall. He stated these types of projects take money.

Chief Watts explained the traffic signs that show how fast someone is going also collects data; they are another tool used to help with addressing those issues. The officers wrote 1,151 citations last year. They have already written 904 citations this year, with 134 of them being for speeding.

Ms. Malcom expressed concern about the noise issue all around the City. She stated it is becoming more than just a slight nuisance. It is not just vehicles and trucks; it is also motorcycles. The noise effects the quality of life in the downtown areas. She stated maybe a more structured noise ordinance needs to be implemented to help the Police Department.

Mr. Dickinson stated when he was the Mayor in Monroe the Police Department was exactly the same size as it is now. The City has grown, times have changed, and there are more issues. The City has to make some tough financial decisions to get a sufficient size police force. He discussed the budget, allocations, and taxes. The City is going to do the full

rollback rate for taxes this year, which other government entities in this County are not doing. The current Police Department can only cover so much; more officers have to be put on the streets in order to get more safety. The officers can not be everywhere all of the time. He stated citizens need to support the City when asked to pay a little more in order to get that protection. He discussed the increased costs and the hard financial decisions that have to be made to get more funding to achieve the safety.

Ms. Susan Walker, of 220 Felker Street, stated she moved here three years ago and does not know what the solution is. She is losing two neighbors, due to all of the noise. Her cousin calls every weekend, because there seems to be full-blown concerts in her backyard. The noise shakes the houses and makes pictures fall off of the walls; it has happened at 7:00 in the morning. She agrees the citizens will have to pay to help with the increased funding. She understands there is no perfect place to live, and it will never be solved completely. It is a constant on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings starting between 6:00 pm and 7:00 pm. She feels that everyone would give more to get more help to come up with a solution.

Chairman Bradley stated there has been some staff added to the Police Department over the last few years, but the City is not near what it needs to be. He appreciates everyone that came tonight and hears what they are saying. The City is making some progress but is not naïve enough to think things are where they need to be. It is a high crime area and Chief Watts is putting more police presence there as he can. Mr. Bradley stated that he believes the City needs to adopt additional noise ordinances. The City is going to continue to work on this project. He urged everyone to get business cards from the department and talk to them in depth.

Chief Watts stated he would be happy to discuss their concerns in depth with them. The patrol force must be increased, but Major McClung has just implemented a new tactic. When officers are normally off, they are given the opportunity to work overtime in the areas with specific issues, along with the officers that are on duty.

No Action.

2. Other Business

There was no other business to discuss.

No Action.

III. ADJOURN

*Motion by Dickinson, seconded by Malcom.
Passed Unanimously.*