

POLICE COMMITTEE MINUTES

March 10, 1999

The Police Committee of the City of Mesa met in the lower level meeting room of the Council Chambers, 57 East 1st Street, on March 10, 1999 at 5:05 p.m.

COMMITTEE PRESENT

Pat Pomeroy, Chairman
John Giles
Bill Jaffa

COMMITTEE ABSENT

None

STAFF PRESENT

C.K. Luster
Kevin Adam
Kathy Barrett
Linda Crocker
Luigi Digirolamo
Mike Hutchinson
Barbara Jones
Craig Jones
Mike Kalember
Ellen Pence
Bryan Raines
Tom Remes
Rebecca Standage
Jan Strauss
Michael Whalen
Others

OTHERS PRESENT

Bill Burke
Joanie Flatt
Jan Hibbard
Lars Jarvie
Joan Payne
Robbie Sherwood
B.J. Tatro
Janet Vinzant
Others

Chairman Pomeroy welcomed those present to the meeting and announced that the purpose of this meeting is to provide the members of the Police Committee an opportunity to review the consultant's report and evaluation, consider staff's recommendations and pose questions regarding this issue. Chairman Pomeroy explained that this is not a public hearing and therefore citizen input will not be allowed at this time.

1. Hear a report and evaluation of the photo radar speed and red light program.

Police Chief Jan Strauss and Assistant Police Chief Mike Whalen addressed the Committee regarding this agenda item.

Chief Whalen briefly reviewed the contents of a Council Report and the consultant's Evaluation of the Effects of Photo Radar Speed and Red Light Camera Technologies on motor Vehicle Crash Rates that was distributed to the members of the Committee and provided background information on this issue. Chief Whalen advised that in response to increasing accident rates within the City and a record number of traffic fatalities in 1995 and 1996, the Mesa Police Department initiated research regarding the implementation of photo safety technology in Mesa.

Chief Whalen reported that staff discovered at that time that none of the cities utilizing this technology had undertaken a study of crash rates before and after photo safety implementation to gauge the effectiveness of the technology. Chief Whalen stated that following discussions with representatives of the Arizona State University (ASU) College of Public Programs, the City entered into a contract with ASU Professor Janet Vinzant and B.J. Tatro, a private consultant with the firm B.J. Tatro Consulting, Inc.

Discussion ensued relative to the fact that the consultants developed an implementation and evaluation plan to study the photo safety program over a two-year period and compare crash rates against the previous two years, the fact that four zones were established within the City, including one to serve as a control zone without enforcement, a second which would contain photo red light and speed enforcement, a third which would contain speed enforcement only and a fourth zone which solely utilized red light enforcement equipment, the RFP process and responses, the selection of U.S. Public Technologies, Inc., (USPT) as the City of Mesa's traffic enforcement equipment vendor, the fact that Lockheed-Martin has since purchased USPT and is the current vendor, and the fact that the program was initiated on December 1, 1996.

Chief Whalen informed the Committee that warnings were issued to speed violators between December 1, 1996 and December 31, 1996 and enforcement and citations began on January 2, 1997. Chief Whalen reported that all twelve intersections and the three speed vans were not fully operational until February 1, 1997 and added that the compilation of crash data began on January 2, 1997 and has continued through January 31, 1999.

Additional discussion ensued regarding the contents of the contract with USPT, the impact of the program on City staffing, the fact that in October 1997, the Council approved the consultants' recommendation that although the first seven months' data reflected positive changes in crash rates in all of the four zones, the program should continue in force for the two full years, the fact that the contract was extended through December 31, 1998, and an additional continuance of the contract to May 1, 1999 to allow the enforcement to remain constant through the end of the study period on January 31, 1999.

Chief Whalen advised that the consultants submitted their report to the Police Department on March 1, 1999 and noted that the report concludes that photo safety enforcement has influenced crash rates within the City of Mesa. Chief Whalen stated that the findings indicate a reduction in crash rates in all four quadrants, including the control zone, and said that the largest reduction of crash rates occurred in the zone where the Department was utilizing photo red light and photo speed enforcement. Chief Whalen said that the report also indicated that a reduction in the number of crashes in zones 2, 3 and 4 was significant enough to conclude that photo safety did in fact have an impact.

Chief Whalen informed the Committee that one of the difficulties that has been encountered throughout the study period was the citation issuance rate. Chief Whalen explained that the Police Department issues citations to approximately 30% of violators photographed and said that the photo quality of the driver of the vehicle and license plates has been a major concern. Chief Whalen stated that numerous attempts have been made by the vendor to address this problem and that although the quality has improved, obstructed plates, sun glare and photo problems still exist. Chief Whalen also advised that a second contributor to the low issuance rate is the fact that the Department requires a gender match on the driver in order to issue a citation.

Chief Whalen reported that legislation has been proposed that would make the registered owners of the vehicles responsible for the speed violations and said that the Department supports this legislation.

Chairman Pomeroy welcomed former Police Chief Lars Jarvie to the meeting and solicited questions from the Committee regarding the results of the consultant's study.

In response to a question from Committeemember Giles, Mr. Bill Burke, representing the vendor Lockheed-Martin, advised that the City's citation rate is comparable to the City of Tempe's issuance level.

Committeemember Jaffa clarified that ASU was not involved in the study and/or endorsement of the traffic safety program and that the only connection with that facility is the fact that Dr. Janet Vinzant is a professor on ASU's staff.

Dr. Vinzant and Dr. B.J. Tatro addressed the Committee and briefly outlined the contents of their evaluation and reviewed motor vehicle crash rates by quadrant and by intersection and motor vehicle crashes involving nonfatal injuries by quadrant. Dr. Vinzant and Dr. Tatro noted that a reduction has occurred in motor vehicle crashes related to the intersections used in the two-year pilot study. Dr. Vinzant stated that based on their analysis, she and Dr. Tatro have concluded that the use of red light and photo red camera technology is helping the City of Mesa achieve its goal of reducing crash rates.

In response to a question from Chairman Pomeroy, Dr. Tatro stated the opinion that the reduction in crash rates is statistically significant. Dr. Tatro advised that studies were done to determine whether the same reduction in crashes would have occurred solely by chance and said that this outcome would have been highly unlikely.

Discussion ensued relative to statistics on accidents rates among other cities, the importance of continuing to compile statistical information on this issue, and other enforcement mechanisms that have been implemented, such as selective traffic enforcement, that may be contributing to the reduction in crashes.

2. Discuss the above report and discuss and consider the future of the photo radar and red light program.

In response to a request from Committeemember Jaffa, Drs. Vinzant and Tatro provided a brief synopsis of their educational and professional background and credentials.

Committeemember Jaffa questioned whether the report contains results that are statistically significant enough to justify the expansion of the photo radar and red light program.

In response to questions from Committeemember Jaffa, Dr. Vinzant discussed the "spill over effect" of the technology.

Chairman Pomeroy requested that Chief Whalen outline the Police Department's recommendations regarding the photo radar and red light program.

Chief Whalen stated that the Department recommends that the Photo Safety Program be continued and expanded and stated that the proposed expansion will allow speed enforcement vehicles to operate anywhere they are required within the City of Mesa. Chief Whalen added that the Department also recommends that the number of vans be expanded from three to five and noted that this would allow each patrol district to have an enforcement van in addition to the Traffic Unit, which would utilize a van for special enforcement purposes.

Chief Whalen advised that the Department further recommends that the Red Light Program also be continued and expanded and added that the proposed expansion would include the installation of camera housings and

traffic loops at the 20 high crash rate intersections within the City. Chief Whalen said that intersections that do not have cameras in the housings would still appear to be operational and would include flash mechanisms.

Chief Whalen explained that the intersections would include left turn arrow enforcement where appropriate. Chief Whalen added that the Department also recommends that a comprehensive signage campaign be initiated throughout the City to promote awareness of the program. Chief Whalen informed the Council that the Department's final recommendation is to initiate an extensive revision of the citation issuance policy and briefly outlined the contents of the proposed policy revisions.

Chief Whalen stated that the vendor has asked the Department to consider an extension of the contract through the year 1999 to enable them to collect additional data but indicated that staff's recommendation is to proceed with the issuance of a new RFP at this time.

Chairman Pomeroy stressed the importance of initiating enforcement for drivers who continue making left hand turns after the light has turned red. Chairman Pomeroy added that he also has received numerous complaints from citizens regarding radar speed enforcement in areas where traffic limits change from one speed to another. Chairman Pomeroy requested that the Department review these two items.

In response to comments from Committeemember Giles regarding his support for 'no points' legislation, City Manager Charles Luster advised that proposed legislation on this issue has not received support and will not be enacted in the near future.

Chief Strauss advised that the Department has indicated support for this legislation and will continue to voice their opinion regarding this matter.

Committeemember Giles encouraged staff to continue to gather statistics relative to accident levels among surrounding communities that do not utilize photo radar and/or red light cameras. Committeemember Giles concurred with Chairman Pomeroy's recommendation that the issue of citations for speeding in areas where sudden speed limit changes occur should be reviewed. Committeemember Giles added that this issue and the question of signage/public relations campaign may be directed to the Traffic Safety Committee for their recommendations.

It was moved by Committeemember Giles, seconded by Chairman Pomeroy, to recommend to the City Council that the recommendations of the staff be approved and that staff be directed to proceed with the preparation of a Request for Proposals (RFP).

Committeemember Jaffa stated that although he does not oppose the continuation of the contract, he would prefer Alternative No. 3, continuing the current contract through an extension until 12-31-99 and the drafting of an RFP. Committeemember Jaffa commented that in his opinion, the statistics and analysis does not clearly indicate that the City of Mesa should proceed with the program. Committeemember Jaffa and said that he would prefer to continue the study and direct staff to continue to gather information and statistics on this important matter prior to rendering a decision. Committeemember Jaffa added that the City should continue to move forward and review other enforcement programs/enforcement technology and stressed the importance of obtaining citizen input.

In response to a question from Committeemember Giles, Mr. Luster stated that staff could prepare an RFP and present it to the Police Committee for review.

Committeemember Giles indicated support for the preparation of an RFP and emphasized that the public should have ample opportunity to review and provide input regarding the RFP. Committeemember Giles stated that in his opinion the Committee should recommend to the full Council that staff be directed to proceed with the preparation of a draft RFP but stated that prior to the issuance of the RFP in April, this issue should once again be placed on the agenda of a Police Committee meeting. Committeemember Giles said that following the April meeting, the Committee will present final recommendations to the Council on whether to issue the drafted RFP.

Chairman Pomeroy advised that if the above listed comments reflect the intent of Committeemember Giles' motion which he seconded, he would like to withdraw his second to that motion and explained that it is his intention to recommend that the program be expanded as recommended by staff.

Committeemember Giles stated the opinion that public scrutiny should occur prior to the issuance of final Committee recommendations.

Additional discussion occurred among the members of the Committee regarding this issue.

Committeemember Giles stated the opinion that the research that has been performed is statistically significant but added that he would like to provide citizens who may potentially disagree with that opinion an opportunity to review the materials that the Committee has reviewed and provide their input regarding this issue. Committeemember Giles commented that he is inclined to believe he will support the final issuance of an RFP but is delaying that action to allow public scrutiny to occur.

For the purpose of clarification, Committeemember Giles withdrew his motion and Chairman Pomeroy withdrew his second to the motion.

It was moved by Committeemember Giles, seconded by Chairman Pomeroy, to recommend to the Council that staff be directed to proceed with the preparation of a Request for Proposals (RFP) to expand the photo radar and red light program City-wide, as recommended, and that the drafted RFP be presented to the Police Committee for further review and consideration at a future Police Committee meeting.

Committeemember Jaffa commented that although he questions the accuracy of the statistics and whether significant justification exists upon which to base a decision to expand the program, he is not opposed to recommending to the full Council that staff be directed to prepare a draft RFP to present to the Committee at a future meeting. Committeemember Jaffa added that an opportunity will exist for public debate to occur regarding the RFP and the enforcement program. Committeemember Jaffa added that this issue should be open to public debate at a scheduled City Council meeting.

In response to a question from Mr. Luster, Chairman Pomeroy requested that the Committee's recommendation be placed on the agenda of the Monday, March 15, 1999 Regular Council Meeting.

3. Adjournment.

Without objection, the Police Committee adjourned at 6:16 p.m.

I hereby certify that the foregoing minutes are a true and correct copy of the minutes of the Police Committee meeting of the City of Mesa, Arizona, held on the 10th day of March, 1999. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that a quorum was present.

Dated this ____ day of _____ 1999

BARBARA JONES, CITY CLERK