



Published September 30th, 2020

OPD officers will wear body cameras

By Sora O'Doherty

In an ongoing effort to examine and improve policing after repeated national incidents of police misconduct, the Orinda City Council continued to review local policies, and adopted a rule requiring Orinda police officers to wear body cameras while on duty. The matter seemed to cause major confusion, however, when Police Chief David Cook explained that the body cameras, which are to be activated when an interaction with a member of the public begins, have the ability to turn on automatically when a weapon or a taser is drawn. Cook had to repeatedly explain that the policy requires officers to turn on the cameras at the beginning of an interaction, but that the automatic function merely provides a backup in the event that an officer has not turned on the camera. The automatic function of the Axon Body Cam 3 will turn on all police cameras within 30 feet of an incident.

The city council unanimously adopted the five recommendations offered by city staff. Most of the recommendations concerned instating a body worn camera program for the OPD, including approving the contract with Axon Enterprises, Inc., allocating \$18,000 from the general fund reserves to pay for the first year of equipment and service costs. In addition, the council, at staff's recommendation, established a public safety subcommittee and directed the mayor and city manager to continue to explore opportunities to collaborate with the Orinda Union School District.

During his presentation, Cook said the body worn camera program will cost Orinda about \$16,568 per year and will give Orinda access to the same data storage system as the Contra Costa District Attorney's Office, so submitting data will be as simple as sending a link to the DA. According to Cook, in 2019 OPD responded to 11,265 calls for service, including 213 "select crimes" (which include serious crimes against persons or property), 40 mental health commitments, and 143 arrests that gave rise to eight use-of-force incidents. Of those, six were actions taken by an officer to overcome resistance, and two involved use of a closed fist. In 2020 thus far there have been 8,550 calls for service, 121 select crimes, 63 arrests and two use-of-force incidents, one of which involved a closed fist.

Cook also discussed the Contra Costa Sheriff's Office's work to grow mental health programs, including a full-time deputy for the Mental Health Evaluation Team and the addition of an in-custody program. The Contra Costa County public managers association has established a subcommittee on mental health to review current structure of services, needs and resources, Cook said, and all Orinda officers will attend refresher training in crisis intervention and de-escalation.

The Public Safety Subcommittee should meet quarterly to receive reports from the chief of police including crime and arrest statistics, information on the use of cameras in solving crimes, use of force statistics, racial and identify profiling statistics when such statistics become available, and updates on legislation. Most important, Cook felt, would be updates from the city manager and a public forum for questions, concerns and feedback.

The city council also heard from OUSD Superintendent Carolyn Seaton and members of the board, including board members Hilary Weiner, Liz Daoust and Director of Curriculum David Schragg

In public comments, Heather Jinnalone asked why police officers are sent on mental health calls, and Cook explained that the only time police should be involved is when there is a danger to public safety or to the person, which is what is covered by California Health and Welfare Code section 5150 that governs when people may be subjected to a 72-hour mental health hold.

Cook said that he would try to get more information about mental health issues onto the Orinda police website.

Rebecca Verity expressed concern about the way police officers respond to ally witnesses, who stop, witness, even film. "I've had three incidents reported to me where OPD retaliated against people witnessing, filming," she said.

City council candidate Latika Malkani reported that she is very pleased that the city is finally moving forward with concrete recommendations and was thrilled to see the city welcome a partnership with the schools. The current recommendations are not the end but the beginning, she said, adding that access to data is critical, also with a mandate to come up with additional recommendations.

Diana Honig asked Cook why police are waiting to implement Race and Identity Statistics. "Ninety-nine percent of the time when I see someone pulled over, it is a person of color," she said.

Cook responded that the technology solution has been created and is now being tested. "As soon as it is ready," he said, "we'll start collecting the data," but he added that he does not know when that will be.

Reach the reporter at: sora@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA