

CITY OF BEVERLY
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES

BOARD OR COMMISSION: Unify Beverly
DATE: August 25, 2020
LOCATION: Held virtually over Zoom
PANEL: Abu Toppin, Leah Jones, Caja Johnson,
Mayor Michael Cahill, Chief John LeLacheur
RECORDER: Sarah Scott-Nelson

Introduction

Mayor Michael Cahill opens the meeting at 6:45 p.m. The meeting began late due to technical difficulties caused by a power outage. Mayor Cahill announces that today's topic centers around policing in Beverly as well as the Human rights Commission and Equity Initiative.

Panelist Opening Comments

Leah Jones acknowledges the courage of Beverly's people of color and states that she is here to listen, learn, and encourage empathy and action in us all.

Chief John LeLacheur comments on his 38 years in law enforcement, stating that he hopes to stay in Beverly long term, has been a part of the Human Rights Committee since it began. Chief LeLacheur comments on the tremendous amount of great work the Human Rights Committee has done, and asserts that his role is to make officers professional and well-trained as well as diverse, acknowledging that this is difficult under the Massachusetts system, but that it is the goal of the Beverly Police Department.

Caja Johnson, Beverly resident and Human Rights Committee member expresses that she is looking forward to hearing from the community and having potentially uncomfortable conversations. Johnson states that two hours is not enough but we have to start somewhere.

Mayor Cahill comments that this is the second conversation but definitely not the last, and expresses his desire to try to create as many opportunities as possible for dialogue. Mayor Cahill begins with the topic of policing and racial justice and equity initiative, sharing a couple slides with policing and how it fits into the bed budget including that policing has taken up 6% of Beverly's annual budget with the largest budget item being education. This price breaks down to 70 total police officers and \$195 per person in Beverly, which Mayor Cahill states is significantly less than many of our neighbors. Mayor Cahill comments that there is still a need for more officers to fully staff every shift consistently. He also states that Beverly already embraces 6 of the "Eight Can't Wait" list. The two exceptions are for chokehold and firearm out of a moving vehicle which are reserved to when an officer is defending their own life or the life of a third person. Mayor Cahill then announces that there is room in the budget for a Racial Justice and Equity Initiative, but that the content of that initiative is part of this evening's discussion. Mayor Cahill asks for community comments on how that money could best be allocated, whether to train for officials and the community at large, a Human Rights Commission staff member, or something else, but the funds will hopefully be allocated in late September by City Council vote.

Abu Toppin, proud Beverly resident, states that he is proud because we are here and many in the nation are not. Topping asserts that success is a journey not a destination.

Comments from Community Members

Stephen Bologne reports that he contacted Todd Rotondo with his concerns about the Black Lives Matter (BLM) flag being flown at City Hall. Bologne's concern is that this flag does not show a lot of support for law enforcement. Bologne states that he has no problems with it being flown on private property, but asks if Mayor Cahill will consider flying the thin blue line flag at City Hall this month as he wants to see support for our law enforcement officers as well.

Mayor Cahill explains that he decided to fly the BLM flag because the reality is that black lives have not mattered in the same way as white lives in the last 400 years, that a lot of tragedy and devastation has been realized because of overt and systemic racism in this country's history. He states that his focus is entirely on the words of the flag because it is vital that the black people who live in and come into Beverly know that Beverly values their lives. Mayor Cahill states that he also always supports Beverly's police so that they have the support and training they need. Ultimately, Mayor Cahill states that he has no intention of flying another flag at this time, but appreciates Bologne's thoughts, reiterating that the focus is not on the organization, but our friends, neighbors and family members.

Mayor Cahill then clarifies the initiative, stating that Beverly's City Council has set aside 100,000 in the FY2021 budget to address racial justice and equity. He states that this is just a beginning, as the city is doing research on how others are spending their money and resources towards this end, but no decisions have yet been made on how to spend that money.

Toppin asks Johnson to address Bologne's concern. Johnson states that the BLM flag is meant to show that black lives are seen, heard and welcomed, but that it does not seem to be necessary for the Police Department's lives to be heard and welcomed, as there are already many who are willing to support and back them. Johnson states that there are many worthy groups for whom flags could be made for in this time, such as nurses or educators, but the focus currently needs to be on the most vulnerable population, as a way of symbolizing unity.

Jones thanks Bologne for starting off the conversation. Jones states that she believes that all people should feel seen at City Hall, but her daughters who are black don't feel seen at City Hall even though she tells them they can be lawyers or council members, etc. Jones stated that she feels that the BLM flag should continue to fly at City Hall today, though it has since been taken down. She expressed that it is important to show people with a symbol that they are safe here, and that she does not feel that BLM and supporting our police need to be pitted against each other as we are all on the same team.

Chief LeLacheur asserts that you don't have to pick a side, and that he wants everyone to be pro-police, pro-BLM, and pro anti-racism, stating that the goal is to kill racism. Chief LeLacheur also clarifies that patrols are based on crime rates, not demographics.

Dr. HC Robinson, Manchester resident, comments that she is excited to look in with solidarity. She is part of the North Shore NAACP chapter which started in July, and asks Mayor Cahill about roadwork and policing and whether he is including details. Chief LeLacheur answers that they are paid by private companies. Jones invites Robinson to come to an HR Committee meeting to share more about what she's doing. Robinson responds that she will put her contact in the chat.

Mayor Cahill addresses a concern about taking school resource officers, SROs, out of schools, commenting his support for the value which SROs can bring. Chief LeLacheur adds that only 2% of the work SROs do is police work, mostly it is family work, works with counselors, and suicide prevention, which served an extremely valuable function, as well as protecting the school from outside influences. Chief LeLacheur states that he wants the kids to have positive interactions with the officers, not negative

ones, and hopes that SROs will provide that opportunity as they often read in classes, walk around and talk with students, etc.

Toppin agrees that it is important for students to view officers as resources, not adversaries.

Johnson comments that the SROs were the first officers which she has had contact with. She states that she sees them as a great resource and kids often open up to them more than they open up to teachers.

Carol Rein comments that she appreciates each of the panel members and their own perspective and appreciates their support. Rein asks about having a Racial Justice Department rather than Initiative, and asks who will be making the decisions as far as spending the allocated funds.

Mayor Cahill answers that a department or office is a suggestion to the request brought early June by the Human Rights Committee members. He states that he did not want to assume that a department was the right way to spend the money. Ultimately the decision will ultimately be made by Mayor Cahill and the City Council, but they are asking for suggestions on how the community thinks that money should be spent towards this purpose.

Jones comments that she feels super strongly that a person needs to be put in place quickly as a person in office would help set the guidelines and help make evidence-based decisions.

Johnson states that she also strongly agrees that Beverly needs goal-oriented action plans including both short and long-term actions. She adds that while she really enjoys these meetings, it would make more sense and be more productive if people could see where the action is taking place after these conversations.

Jeff Matton asks if there is a space for a discussion between BLM and blue lives matter supporters. He comments that it is sad that it is an "us versus them: mentality, but would like to see a space for those two groups as well as the Police Department to be able to come together and talk.

Lauren Barthold comments that she wanted to give a shout out to the Police Department as she has always felt supported and protected by Beverly Police, and is saddened to learn that black residents have not felt the same sense of safety and support. She also states that to name racism is not an attack, it is a description, and she also feels a sense of urgency in hiring a person for the Racial Equity Initiative. She comments that while she herself loves research, she believes it is time for moving beyond research and into action, as stopping at research will not lead to any real progress.

Mayor Cahill replies that as much as we all want action, early action is conversation and learning, but he adds that Beverly will likely create a position to fill.

Johnson suggests that maybe this conversation needs a direction or description of this position.

Jones expresses that she feels a deep urgency and the need for dates and goals soon, echoing what she is reading in the live chat on the call.

Naisha Tatis asks what Beverly is doing to address cases like Jacob's and suggests sending an essential worker who is better trained to address these situations rather than an officer.

Chief LeLacheur says the # of officers killed on domestic calls is discouraging and high, noting that domestic calls are some of the most dangerous calls. He adds that social workers get attacked too, so last

year a de-escalation component was added and he is currently working toward adding a cultural component.

Tatis follows up with a second question clarifying the goal of today's conversation. Tatis speaks about her survey of opinions on housing, etc. in Beverly of Beverly's people of color.

Norrie Gall asks that the Beverly Police Department provide their arrest statistics with racial and ethnic data. Gall comments that she is worried that hiring a staff person will create a mentality that someone else will come in and save us from our racism. Gall asks about actions towards being actively anti-racist, not just not racist. She states that the need to do things quickly and urgently is a pillar of white supremacy, and is asking for a concrete action step, whether a flag or a commitment to antiracism. Gall also comments that she feels like this meeting is a haphazard conversation, not a well-facilitated discussion toward improving the city, and asks for actionable steps for 3 weeks from now.

Chief LeLacheur comments that the Police Department has increased its time spent walking around out of cars and interacting with people, and asks for Gall's phone number for future conversations with her because he states that he cannot fix anything if he doesn't have specifics.

Johnson thanks Gall for her courage, and states that she wants BLM to be visible somewhere in the city as this is something which can be done immediately, while working towards equitable representation can take longer to implement.

Jones stated that one thing Beverly can do is to build on the momentum of the HR Council, Councilor Rand, and Mayor Cahill started on anti-racism training is to make a decision on whether CCI was a good fit, and schedule another training.

Mayor Cahill comments his thanks, states that he is listening, and will do his best to digest what was said and have a follow-up conversation. Mayor Cahill states that he is committed to increasing trainings, as much as possible. The anti-racism training last week was the first, but that is an actionable step, and Beverly is actively looking to create, develop, and foster relationships with college, universities, and career centers, regionally and beyond in an effort that our jobs would better reflect our community.

Jones reads a direct request in comments for the BLM flag to be flown 12 months a year and asks that Mayor Cahill at least walk away with a yes or no for that very clear and actionable request.

Mayor Cahill comments that the panelists met earlier and discussed the BLM flag at length, but that he has not yet decided on how best to represent the city's commitment to being anti-racist. He states that there are challenges within the community due to how some members of the community are associating the flag with the organization. Mayor Cahill explains that the BLM flag flew for one month, which was the same amount of time for which the Pride and Trans flags flew, and no such flag has yet flown for longer than one month at City Hall. He concludes that he has been trying as Mayor to figure out a way to unify Beverly, but does not have an answer tonight.

Johnson states that she disagrees that it's impossible to unify everyone in Beverly and holds on to the hope that this is an achievable goal. Johnson states that doing the right thing is not easy and that she gets the feeling that the feelings of white people are more important than the feelings of black people who are feeling uncomfortable every single day in Beverly. She adds that BLM has been nothing but peaceful in the city of Beverly. Johnson expresses that she is not happy, but hopes that Mayor Cahill thinks about the request to hang the BLM flag at City Hall more permanently as she'd like her daughter to see something in the City that communicates that she is wanted, even if she cannot be a Police Officer or Mayor or City Councilor.

Claudia comments that while the Mayor is feeling pressed about the flag, she cannot say more strongly that the BLM flag should fly until our vision statement is met, that this cause would not have any opposition in Beverly. Claudia states that Beverly should support law enforcement in its healthiest form and that she would like to share her experiences and services to further this work (to whomever is hired or put in place to continue this work). Claudia thanks everyone for their leadership and bravery.

Jones comments that she has been hearing lots about the word empathy, which is not just feeling what someone is feeling, but taking action on that understanding of others' feelings. Jones states that Beverly has been asked before and should not need to be asked again to make BLM visible in the city, as it needs to come from the heart and center around what we're trying to tell the community of Beverly, specifically the black community of Beverly.

Johnson comments that the black community is hurting right now, and until she can see something tangible, she does not feel that the black community is welcome in Beverly. She adds that she is tired of asking because after asking too many times, her requests begin to feel like an attempt to force Beverly into doing something it is unwilling to do.

Toppin states that he agrees that there should be no timetable on how long the BLM flag is up, stating that it should be up until we no longer have that as an issue. Topic also comments that he has given up attempting to make people comfortable in order to advance this cause and begin to address the injustice which has been taking place for hundreds of years. He asserts that if Beverly wants to be dedicated to this, it has to take a risk and be willing to put itself on a line because it is right.

Johnson comments that she has not seen any questions about BLM as an organization in the chat section today, but states that it is not the burden on the black community or the city to research their credibility. Johnson expresses her discouragement that this cause needs to be justified to the public. She states that she is here and willing to do the work, but has to be honest that she is frustrated.

Joan Amaral states that she would like to see Beverly trust people of color and not fall into white people telling black people what we need. She adds that black people cannot wait for white people to get fully educated before moving forward. She comments that Mayor Cahill and the City Council are white people, so Beverly should bring in someone from the community for this initiative. Amaral concludes that she wants Mayor Cahill to know that he is not alone and has many people supporting him, so he does not need to feel like he needs to figure this out himself.

Arielle Wright comments that not flying the flag perpetuates white supremacy and oppression. Wright states that Police Departments were created to be racist and oppressive and beseeches Beverly to be open about how it is actively breaking down the systemic racisms in the Police Department structure and laws.

Dominic contributes that if there is a problem with the BLM flag, why not create Beverly's own flag that says "Beverly believes in the value of black lives" and put that up at city hall? Dominic states that as a city, Beverly needs to stand up and say that this is what we believe in, and the only viable response to this message is "yes they do."

Katie asks about a safe way to disclose information to Mayor Cahill and Chief LeLacheur. Chief LeLacheur suggests emails and provides his email address: beverlychief@beverlyma.gov stating that he has never seen anyone be retaliated against for reporting incidents or concerns, and encourages the community to reach out to him.

Mayor Cahill states that he can be contacted at mayorcahill@beverlyma.gov and will do everything they can to respond to concerns and do better going forward.

Closing Panelist Remarks

Leah Jones expresses her thanks to those who spoke, for their courage. Jones states that Councilor Rand has asked for a newspaper or communication to provide accountability and for celebration of things that are happening around issues of equity in Beverly. Jones then passes her moment to Na. Diop.

Na. Diop chooses not to contribute at this time in the hopes that this conversation will continue in the future and move forward. She states that she is left with many questions and hopes to see many more conversations in the future.

Caja Johnson expresses her thanks to everyone present.

Chief LeLacheur states that there is a lot of work to be done, that he wants people to feel safe walking around Beverly, commenting that he grew up in a city where he did not feel safe and he does not want that to be Beverly.

Mayor Cahill expresses his thanks for those who spoke, appreciating their articulate words and determination, for letting him know what they agreed and disagreed with, and giving him a lot to think about, and he encouraged them to stay involved in this forum and reach out to him individually as well.

Toppin expressed his thanks and looks forward to taking this journey together, as together we can. Toppin closes the meeting at 9:23 p.m.