

OUTLAW, from page 10

presentation's answers and questions, and I was kind of hoping that people would have forgotten that I had played the call in the beginning, and say, "Oh by the way, an hour and however many seconds has passed. That's how long it took for officers to respond to this person that had just been a victim of an armed carjacking. And the dispatcher told them somebody would be right there."

What had happened in that call is there were officers not very far from where this victim was, but they were tied up on another critical incident right down the street on Naito Parkway.

Our response times are getting slower and slower, and it's not because we're out here dragging our feet. Everyone has the same criticism and complaint, quite frankly.

You might only need to call the police one time, and if I need you that one, good time, I need you here – and if you don't come? My impression of the police forever will be a negative, or it will be: You didn't come because I am a (fill in the blank).

So the answer is no. It's not that we only provide services to the certain demographics – the rich people or whatever – because the folks that are rich have the same complaints.

As the city grows, population-wise, the trend lines are going in opposite directions; the city is growing, but the number of officers is going down.

And I'm not saying as officers that we need to be this occupying force; it's just to handle basic calls for service so we can get there in a timely manner to answer the needs for demand.

(Editor's note: Portland Police Bureau's average response time to the 87,400 high-priority calls it received during the past 12 months was nine minutes; to the 81,400 medium-priority calls, the average response took 18 minutes; and to the 112,400 low-priority calls, 46 minutes.)

Zuhl: I know you are starting on your five-year strategic plan. What efforts are you making to engage with the homeless population to be a part of this plan?

Outlaw: The steering committee is representatives that pretty much cover almost every demographic possible, or have contact with (those demographics). The whole point was to make sure that it's not just one segment of our community here that's speaking on behalf of everyone. That's the core of the process. They're providing the perspectives through their various lenses to make sure that all the avenues are covered.

(Editors Note: According to the list of membership PPB provided Street Roots, the Strategic Plan Steering Committee includes representatives for immigrants, refugees, sexual minorities, young adults, the NAACP, the Latinx and mental health communities, the mayor's office and the Portland Business Alliance. That's in addition to members of the police bureau. No known homeless representative was listed.)

Zuhl: We had a roundtable with several of our vendors, telling them we were going to be talking with you, and while each vendor had particular experiences, there was a sense that



PHOTO BY KAIA SAND

Portland police respond to the Village of Hope camp in Northeast Portland on Feb. 2. Police conducted a sweep of homeless campers. Police Chief Danielle Outlaw told Street Roots that conversations about police sweeps need to extend beyond just her and Mayor Ted Wheeler.

there was a definite "us versus them," and I'm sure that is indicative of police forces across the country. Are you aware of this perception, and how do you think it can be changed?

Outlaw: Yes, I'm aware of the perception. And that's a tough one. I know it won't be changed overnight. A lot of it is through our actions and relationship building, but I think there also has to be an understanding, and a management, of expectations of our roles and what we're responsible for, and what we do and why.

We still have jobs to do, and we are law enforcement. The question is in the areas where we have discretion, where and when and how do we use that discretion and what does that look like? If we have a situation, where we can make an arrest, for example, but we choose not to, who are we working with to make sure whatever that issue is that drew us there in the first place is abated? Because otherwise, the cycle continues.

You have some folks that are like, "We'll only trust the police if the police leave us alone." It doesn't work that way because if there is a crime that's been committed, there needs to be something done about it. The question is just how.

The same way those in the houseless community have concerns, there are citizens that equally complain on the opposite end who say we're not doing enough.

After the (Oregonian) article came out, I heard a lot of, "Why aren't the numbers higher?" or "There is an encampment outside of my house, a big one, you know I'm getting gas stolen, there's feces left in my driveway. This is ridiculous. I call the police; if and when they do come, they don't do anything; they just move them right

along, and they come right back."

The complaints, I'm getting them from both sides. So my response to everyone is how do we get to where we need to be without addressing what the true cause of the issue is?

We can give somebody a citation. What does that do? It doesn't abate the problem. They're still there. Are you going to come to court? Probably not because all your belongings are here, and if I leave, when I come back, are my belongings still going to be here? It might turn into a warrant. Now I

got a warrant hanging over my head; it snowballs.

Zuhl: That happened to one of our vendors yesterday. He got a ticket for jaywalking that he has no money to pay. It's only going to make it worse for him.

Outlaw: I don't know the circumstances, but we still have a job to do, and I think folks need to understand that. We'll never be in a place where we're completely hands off all of the time.

But I think it begins with opportunities like this when we all come to the table. What helps us, what helps me and what helps officers is when we peel all this stuff off and I get a chance to hear from you.

I know about sites and warrants and belongings and people telling me, "I got assaulted in an encampment. I wanted to call the police but I was afraid to call the police because when we call the police, the police might see other things around in plain sight and now somebody gets arrested or things get confiscated and, really, we just wanted you to come and take care of this person that assaulted me."

You've got to be open to looking at things

a different way.

We think about our responses when we do these things and say, "OK, are there some other ways we can maybe approach this issue, because I wouldn't want that to be me if I was in that situation."

But it can't continue to be, "We are anti-police; can't stand the police because of my experiences, so I won't even sit at the table." That's been told to me: "I won't even sit next to you at City Council." I never even met the person. They know who I am, obviously, because I am the chief. But there is no willingness to even sit down and agree to disagree, and that's the only way we move forward.

Green: In places experiencing opioid epidemics across the country, there is a lot of conversation about safe-injection sites. The Denver City Council on Monday (Nov. 26) approved a pilot project there, although it does need legislative approval. A lot of times, the district attorney and police chief get brought into these conversations because whether or not they support such an idea bears a lot of weight. Would you be supportive of a safe-injection pilot project in Portland?

Outlaw: You know someone mentioned it in a command-staff meeting that we had Tuesday. I can't say either way right now because my follow-up question to that person was, where has it worked before? Tell me the implications around it. I just don't know enough information about it to say either way. I'm certainly open to hearing more about it.

Green: The police chief in Ithaca went up to Vancouver, B.C., where they've had safe-injection sites for a couple of decades now. Is that something that you'd be willing to do?

Outlaw: I would be willing, but then, you know, that can turn into another criticism. Not to be facetious – another criticism about

See OUTLAW, page 12

GET INVOLVED

Do you have feedback you'd like the Portland Police Bureau to consider as it works on its five-year strategic plan? Go to portlandoregon.gov/police/76887