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FORCE:

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— but each incident is reviewed.

“Every use of force is reviewed administratively — that’s inside the department — and they can also be reviewed criminally if it appears somebody has done something extremely inappropriate,” Edmiston said. “... If I felt there was a potential for criminal (consideration), I would automatically call the Oregon State Police (to investigate).”

Edmiston said HPD is researching the possibility using less lethal bean bag projectile shotguns. Officers have also been voluntarily using body cameras, he said, and HPD will be requiring officers to use cameras beginning next month.

“I actually caught a little bit of flack on this from other departments that aren’t transitioning to (cameras),” he said. “I think it’s important. I think it’s the wave of the future. I think it’s important, not only to hold ourselves accountable, but to hold the citizens that we interact with accountable.”

Edmiston said, while helpful, the cameras do not always capture “all the facts all the time,” so officers must use force “reasonably,” in accordance with established policies.

The HPD Policy Manual states, “Officers shall use only that amount of force that reasonably appears necessary given the facts and circumstances perceived by the officer at the time of the event to accomplish a legitimate law enforcement purpose.”

Although “reasonable” can be difficult to define, Edmiston said almost all HPD employees have attended critical incident stress management training in the last two years. He also said that ensuring officers are mentally healthy and prepared for the rigor of the job is important, and the chaplain program started in October

2011 has helped significantly.

“Over the last three and a half years, we’ve really been focusing inside the department on fixing the relationships, and I’m a firm believer that if you have healthy employees, that’s going to equate to healthy decisions being made out on the street,” he said.

Edmiston said HPD employees are also involved with various organizations to establish relationships within the community, and the department began offering a 2 percent pay incentive to bilingual officers last year to better represent the Hispanic population. He said about 37 percent of the city has Hispanic ties, and six of HPD’s 26 officers are bilingual, as are three other employees, including Chaplain Hector Ramirez, who is a member of the Hispanic Advisory Committee.

Edmiston said HPD could only be successful with the trust of the people it serves, and officers must maintain that trust despite their vast “discretionary authority.”

“With that discretion comes scrutiny, and we understand that,” he said. “We’re not always going to get it right, and when we don’t get it right, we’re going to rely on committees such as this and the community to assist us.”

After the meeting, HAC Chairman Eddie De La Cruz said the presentation made him feel more comfortable that officers would make sound decisions.

“I think we have a big chance at preventing all these crazy things that’s been happening around the nation with the police making the wrong decisions,” he said. “Our police department is way ahead. (Edmiston has) done a great job as chief since he took over, and he’s doing his homework. I was very impressed and very happy with the information he provided us. It gave me a sense that we’re OK here.”

COOLING:

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other options.

Jeffery-Hoague said the board has yet to formalize a schedule on when the cooling station will be open. When it does start to get hot, organizers plan for the building to be open possibly from 1 p.m. to 7 p.m. every Saturday and Sunday and on weekdays when temperatures are expected to reach at least 95 degrees.

“What we want to do is keep people from suffering due to the elements,” she said. “We want people to be safe, regardless of the conditions, whether it is too hot or too cold.”

During the warming station board meeting this week, Jeffery-Hoague talked with board members and volunteers about the features the building could have during the new summer daytime hours. She said she had been thinking about offering things like card games and other simple activities, possibly a movie and then a computer station available for people who need to do paperwork. She said they could also have a couple of mats for people to check out if they were interested in taking a nap.

Others discussed the possibility of serving warm-weather foods to help their guests beat the heat.

“We could have a set up right outside the building where we could cut up a watermelon,” Hermiston volunteer Kathy Davis said at the meeting. “Outside would be the perfect place for that.”

Jeffery-Hoague said she liked the idea, but she had to check with the city to make sure something like that would be OK. She said she also has to check with

the city to see what requirements would have to be met to simply operate a daytime facility.

Jeffery-Hoague said she has had offers of donations for computers and has a computer of her own that she doesn’t use anymore that she would like to dedicate to the cause. The facility will also receive a donation of a washer and dryer, which guests may use to do their laundry when they visit the facility.

Board members are currently working on the specific requirements and rules for the cooling station, but Jeffery-Hoague said they want to keep it as least invasive as possible. She said many of the rules at the warming station will be the same for the cooling station, but there might be a simpler sign-in system for guests since they may only be there for a couple of hours as opposed to the whole day.

She said there would still be a strict policy of no weapons, alcohol or drugs, and people could still be asked to leave if they refused to follow the rules.

Volunteer coordinator Barb Leque said warming station organizers were thrilled with the number of volunteers they had this year and hope to have just as many come out for the cooling station.

“We want to provide our guests with at least a few hours of relief,” she said. “Hopefully it will be easier for people to volunteer since we’ll be open on the weekends, and it is during the summer time.”

For information about volunteering for the cooling station this summer, contact Leque at 541-571-2075. For other questions, people can email Jeffery-Hoague at warmingstation@gmail.com or call her at 541-720-4295.



SEAN HART PHOTO

Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston, right, responds to questions from Hermiston's Hispanic Advisory Committee regarding the department's use-of-force policies at the meeting Monday.



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