

**Public Safety Advisory Commission – Columbus, GA**  
**Monthly Meeting Minutes**

**Date:** 2/17/2022  
**Location:** Virtual Meeting  
**Start time:** 4:00 PM  
**Adjournment time:** 5:00 PM  
**Next meeting:** March 17, 2022  
**Meeting Recorder:** Annalisa Shelling

**Members Present:**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> David Rohwedder, Chair    | <input type="checkbox"/> Donald Watkins             |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pete Temesgen, Vice-Chair | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Stan Swiney     |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Byron Hickey              | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lisa Branchcomb |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Belvin Millner            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alexander King  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Scott Taft                |   |

**Others Present/Visitors:**

Guest Speaker – Lt. Ralph Dowe of the Columbus Police Department and Local FOP (Fraternal Order of Police) President.

**Minutes**

The February 2022 Meeting started at 4:00 PM. Mr. David Rohwedder welcomed everyone to the meeting. Mr. Byron Hickey made a motion to approve the January minutes and Mr. Belvin Millner seconded the motion. The January 2022 minutes were approved.

Lt. Ralph Dowe began a lengthy conversation with the commission members. Lt. Dowe stated that in his opinion the police department is not able to provide citizens with proper safety in the city. Mr. Rohwedder stated that it appears we are headed to a public safety crisis. Lt. Dowe, Mr. Byron Hickey, and Mr. Stanley Swiney stated that we are already in a public safety crisis. Lt. Dowe read several exit interviews from officers that resigned or retired to the commission. He then told the commission that the local Fraternal Order of Police launched a survey to local FOP members. He discussed a few of the questions asked, and then stated that the rest of the questions would be reviewed at a later time. Lt. Dowe mentioned that Chief Blackmon created a Retention Committee for the Columbus Police Department.

Mr. Byron Hickey stated that he worked for the Columbus Police Department for 30 years under the command of 4 different Police Chiefs. He stated during his tenure, he has never seen the retention issue as he sees now. He stated that his concern is the safety of

the citizens and public safety officials in Columbus, Georgia. He stated that he does not care who is at the head of the agency, and the information that Lt. Dowe gave is alarming in his opinion. He stated that he feels no one wants to address the problem. He made the statement that he is not concerned about other parts of the country, he is concerned about Muscogee County. Mr. Hickey stated that as a citizen, he is hearing the following reasons as to why people are leaving: officers don't feel appreciated, micromanagement from supervisors, overworked, unsafe, and pay compression. He stated that he feels we are in a crisis, and he feels that the Mayor and City Manager need to know this. He stated that the information that Lt. Dowe presented the PSAC needs to be placed on the Mayor's Agenda at the City Council Meeting.

Mr. Stan Swiney stated that is important to find out how to get existing officers to stay.

Mr. Rohwedder mentioned the possibility of the Public Safety Advisory Commission creating an anonymous survey for the Columbus Police Department. It was suggested that that permission would need to be granted from Mayor Henderson and also Chief Blackmon.

Meeting adjourned at 5:10 PM.

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**Next Meeting will be held March 17, 2022, at 4:00 PM. This will be a virtual meeting.**

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