

**TUMWATER PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF VIRTUAL MEETING
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CONVENE: 8:00 a.m.

PRESENT: Chair Peter Agabi and Councilmembers Leatta Dahlhoff and Kelly Von Holtz.

Staff: City Administrator Lisa Parks, City Attorney Karen Kirkpatrick, Finance Director Troy Niemeyer, Fire Chief Brian Hurley, Water Resources and Sustainability Department Director Dan Smith, Acting Police Chief Jay Mason, Deputy Fire Chief Shawn Crimmins, Police Lieutenant Carlos Quiles, and Police Administrative Supervisor Laura Wohl.

**APPROVAL OF
MINUTES:**

**PUBLIC HEALTH AND
SAFETY COMMITTEE,
FEBRUARY 11, 2025:**

MOTION: Councilmember Von Holtz moved, seconded by Councilmember Dahlhoff, to approve the minutes of February 11, 2025 as presented. A voice vote approved the motion.

**THURSTON COUNTY
PROSECUTOR
UPDATE:**

Christy Peters, Thurston County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, advised that she will forward 2023 and 2024 statistics to the City, which her office received on Friday, March 7, 2025. The statistics for 2024 reflect a significant increase in Tumwater referrals and large cases reflective of the largest increase in a decade.

Jon Tunheim, Thurston County Prosecutor, reported the increase in Tumwater cases is not unique to Tumwater because numbers for all county cases have increased in most categories. The most significant increase has been in non-domestic violence referrals, such as crimes not categorized as a domestic violence incident. However, domestic violence referrals have experienced a slight increase over 2023 and 2024 referrals. All categories increased in number to include impaired drivers. The number of cases that were charged also increased.

Thurston County District Court is now currently fully staffed. Efforts over the last 18 months focused on recruiting and retaining lawyers. A number of interns were hired to participate in the Rule-9 Licensed Legal Interns Program, a program that grants a limited license to third-year law students working under the supervision of a lawyer. Seven participants were offered positions contingent upon their graduation and passage of the bar exam. One student is currently participating in the pathway to full employment.

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Unfortunately, the Victim Advocacy Services Program in District Court was reduced affecting Tumwater Municipal Court as well. The reason for the reduction was a change in legislation eliminating the mandatory crime victim county assessment, which served as the funding source for the program. The program was funded from a mandatory assessment placed on all criminal convictions. The Legislature changed the process as optional for judges to impose with support by county prosecutors on the condition the Legislature replaced the funding that would be lost as a consequence of the legislation. Subsequently, judges across the state are not imposing the assessment. The Legislature did not replace the funding for the Victim Penalty Account at the state level. Funding decreased by half for the Victim Advocacy Program. The Office has not filled two advocate positions pending the outcome of the current legislative session to restore funding for the program. Mr. Tunheim added that there are several legislators advocating for the restoration of the funds. Subsequently, the Washington Association of Prosecuting Attorneys feel betrayed by the Legislature as prosecutors supported the removal of the mandatory assessment.

Mr. Tunheim reported the court continues to move cases forward. The Prosecutor's Office has a robust diversion program for cases involving substance use disorder and/or mental health issues. The Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) Program is accepting cases, especially cases involving possession of a controlled substance and use. Those cases are referred to case management and treatment.

Ms. Peters said that operationally, the Prosecutor's Office does not have the funding capacity for a full-time advocate for domestic violence cases; however, if a case is set for trial, is scheduled for a defense interview, or there are any unique impacts associated with the case where an advocate is required, the Prosecutor's Office will cover those cases. The Prosecutor's Office is unable to have an advocate appear in court each day for arraignment purposes. Two domestic violence attorneys are covering domestic violence cases in District Court for Tumwater cases. The lawyers are receiving extra training specifically on domestic violence and their offices are embedded with Superior Court domestic violence prosecutors and victim advocates.

Additionally, recidivism data from diversion cases including Tumwater and any diversion cases in District or Superior Court reflect that enrolled individuals maintaining good contact with diversion officers have been successful in not re-offending. Conversely, in those instances where contact has not been maintained, those individuals are re-entering the judicial system. The

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program offers a way for individuals to avoid the criminal justice system if they have the right resources.

Mr. Tunheim announced the launch a public data dashboard. Initially, the dashboard will only include felony data with Tumwater data included. Misdemeanor data has been delayed, as the Prosecutor's Office does not contract with Lacey or Olympia for misdemeanor offenses. Subsequently, any inclusion of misdemeanor data would be incomplete. Complete countywide data are required for the dashboard. The process will be a phased approach. The public can access the dashboard through the Prosecutor's Office website. The site is hosted by Measures for Justice, a national non-profit organization offering services to county prosecutors. The site called *Commons* will contain Thurston County data and a series of different data points. The Prosecutor's Office plans to provide demonstrations of the dashboard to local jurisdictions beginning in summer 2025.

Chair Agabi asked whether the increase of receipts of evidence related to cases is the reason for an increase in the number of charges. Mr. Tunheim said the numbers are increasing because of increasing calls for law enforcement service or more prosecutable cases forwarded to the Prosecutor's Office. He recommended a review of Tumwater police data to determine if data reflects an increase in cases. In terms of evidence, prosecution and defense practices have change substantially with the introduction of video evidence through body-worn and in-car cameras. Tumwater has employed dashboard cameras on vehicles but has not implemented body-worn cameras at this time. Video evidence increases the workload for each case as video must be reviewed requiring more time than reading a police report. Lawyers are reporting that time spent on cases is increasing for each case. Even if caseload numbers are increasing, the workload has also increased to review video evidence.

Mr. Tunheim reported that this year, the Washington Association of Prosecuting Attorneys is undertaking a workload study for prosecutors across the state at the misdemeanor and felony levels to obtain a sense of the workload of prosecutors and how it is changing with the addition of video evidence. The study will assist in creating some best practices standards for appropriate caseload standards for prosecutors.

The Washington State Supreme Court is considering workload standards for public defenders. The ruling, if in favor, would create financial impacts for cities and counties. He added that he is skeptical of the legitimacy of the study that was used to establish the standards. County prosecutors have agreed to conduct a study that is

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based on state data. That study has been commissioned with an organization that completes similar studies for other states in the country. He anticipates a report issued from the Washington Association of Prosecuting Attorneys in the fall on the current workload and best practices workload for public defenders.

Councilmember Von Holtz inquired about the possibility of collaborating with the Department of Labor and Industries to receive some funding support from its crime victim program. Mr. Tunheim advised that the crime victim fund is for victims to obtain funds for uninsured losses they experienced as a victim of crime. The state also receives federal funding to distribute among the counties; however, federal funding either has been reduced or not appropriated to the states.

Councilmember Dahlhoff inquired about the relationship between the Prosecutor's Office and Family Support Center and Family Education Support Services, especially during times when there is a gap in service to assist in providing domestic violence services as a safety net. Mr. Tunheim responded that the Prosecutor's Office works closely with both organizations. The Family Support Center has a strong working relationship with the Prosecutor's Office. The Domestic Violence Unit was housed at the Family Support Center. Conversations are ongoing to organize a community summit later in the year to reinvigorate the community around domestic violence and intimate partner violence issues. The Prosecutor's Office has the ability to direct victims to the Family Support Center for other services. The Family Education Support Services receives referrals from the civil court on parenting issues. The Prosecutor's Office explores opportunities to collaborate with the organization when possible.

Additionally, the state is funding a project through federal victim services funding for the Domestic Violence High Risk Team (DVHRT) currently managed by SafePlace. SafePlace has been struggling with a lack of staffing. Recently, Ms. Peters and a representative from the Sheriff's Office met with SafePlace representatives and discussed some of the issues. Ms. Peters and the domestic violence lead have been asked to focus efforts on advancing the project as a priority. The program monitors cases involving high risk of reoccurring injuries to a victim and prioritizes those cases using a risk assessment tool. The project is new with staff working on implementing a workable program across the county. The only law enforcement agency working with the Prosecutor's Office is Thurston County Sheriff's Office with a desire that local cities will join the effort as it becomes more organized.

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Ms. Peters commented on the importance of filling the investigator position in support of the new program.

Mr. Tunheim noted that the Prosecutor's Office received a three-year grant from the Office of Crime Victim Advocacy located within the Department of Commerce. The grant is part of DVHRT funding for a domestic violence investigator. The position will be the first in the history of the Prosecutor's Office, although he has been pursuing ways to hire an investigator for the office for some time. An investigator helps to relieve law enforcement and follows up on tasks and tracking witnesses for trials. He anticipates the position will assume a leadership role in launching the DVHRT program.

Councilmember Dahlhoff commented on the efforts for continuous improvement in adapting to the needs of the community and identifying differences services. Most community members are not aware of the efforts occurring behind the scenes to provide services to anyone who has contact with the justice system. She is appreciative of the work by staff with the Prosecutor's Office.

Councilmember Dahlhoff added that she would like information on calls received by Tumwater for all types of incidents versus the rate of prosecution. Acting Police Chief Mason responded that traditionally, the department has provided an update to the committee on annual police operations for the year at its May meeting. The information includes data on calls for service, arrests, and referrals. He described the difficulty of tracking calls to prosecution outcomes. Statistical data is lacking to identify the number of cases because of the complexity of the system.

Mr. Tunheim advised that law enforcement agencies in Thurston County are moving forward on a new records management system. The Prosecutor's Office is a member of the conversation with a goal to link the two record systems so referrals can be processed electronically by the Prosecutor's system, which might benefit the ability to track data across different systems.

ADDITIONAL ITEMS:

Councilmember Dahlhoff asked about the timing to receive an update of the renovation of Tumwater Fire Station T-2.

Fire Chief Hurley advised that staff has selected an architect. A meeting was held with a representative from the architectural firm to review the remodel. The architects will take the input and draft a conceptual design. Following a review of the conceptual design, staff will identify base needs and options to advance the design to present to the committee and the Council. The Fire Department established a T-2 workgroup comprised of approximately seven staff

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members to afford representation of employees assigned to the station.

Councilmember Von Holtz shared that she was approached by a community member expressing concerns about safety in the City. She referred to the Tumwater Safe Program. She and the community member searched the website and both were unable to locate any information about the program. She asked for clarity as to whether the program exists as the community is concerned given recent events. The program might help to offer some sense of safety to community members.

Acting Police Chief Mason advised that the Tumwater Safe Program was implemented in 2018 because of the Governor's directive to all state agencies to collaborate with municipal governments to seek ways to help people in crisis or exposed to bias crime. State agencies and the City developed the concept of a program known as Tumwater Safe. Unfortunately, with the advent of the pandemic and changes in staff, the program was never fully implemented. The program was housed under the Communications Department with the Police Department assisting in coordinating the concept and providing training. The workgroup for the program identified the need for training of employees from organizations participating in the program to help employees learn how to assist someone experiencing a crisis and seeking shelter. The training program was never launched and state agencies struggled with the idea of how to manage individuals experiencing a crisis who enter state office buildings seeking assistance. The program encountered many hurdles that were difficult to overcome and consequently, the program never moved forward. The Safe Program concept was initiated in Seattle and designed as a high functioning program in cities with a downtown core, with areas of high pedestrian traffic, and buildings close to the sidewalk so signs could be visible. Within the City, state office buildings struggled with placement of the signs that would be visible to pedestrians. The concept of the program presented some logistical issues and although the program offered tremendous value, the difficulty was recruiting partners to engage as well as an organization willing to manage the program.

Councilmember Dahlhoff recommended adding the program as a discussion topic during the Council's retreat discussion on the Equity Commission later in the spring. City Administrator Parks affirmed that the first session with the Council will be in April or early May and will center on establishing lists of what the City does, what the City is required to do, and lists of initiatives and projects that are desired. The lists will assist the Council in prioritizing actions, programs, and projects.

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Councilmember Von Holtz commented that she recalled the program listed previously on the City's website and asked that when programs are not successful, there should be communication to the Council that the program was removed from the website and not successfully implemented.

ADJOURNMENT: **With there being no further business, Chair Agabi adjourned the meeting at 8:45 a.m.**

Prepared by Valerie L. Gow, Recording Secretary/President
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