



Sunrise Historical Commission Meeting
Monday, February 12, 2024, 4:00 p.m.
Sunrise City Hall, Everglades Conference Room
10770 W. Oakland Park Blvd., Sunrise FL 33351
Meeting Minutes

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m. by Chairperson Toby Ginsburg Cohen.

II. Roll Call

The following members were found to be present:

Toby Ginsburg Cohen
Heather Clough Robinson
Ketty Andre
Roberto Fernandez III
Philip Howell
Bernard Shaw
Stacy Sherman

Staff present:

Officer Ben Hodgers
Deputy City Clerk Meryl Girard

Self-introductions were made and new board member Ms. Ketty Andre was welcomed.

III. Open Discussion

No one was present.

IV. Approval of Minutes January 8, 2024

MOTION A motion to approve the minutes of January 8, 2024 made by Mr. Howell was seconded by Mr. Shaw. All were favor.

V. Follow Up Items

The board members decided to hear these items after the interview with Officer Hodgers.

A. Public Art Survey

Deputy City Clerk Girard reminded the board members to please complete the Public Art Survey that was emailed to them recently and distributed at the last meeting. Most board members said they had completed the survey.

B. City Hall Grand Opening

Deputy City Clerk Girard reported that the grand opening was a very successful event. She passed around several items from the event; invitation, program, commemorative coin and souvenir from old city hall.

Ms. Sherman noticed the display cases underneath the stairs had memorabilia set up, and encouraged the board members to take a minute to look at it after the meeting.

Mr. Howell attended the event. He said the professionalism was clear. It was not just robotic professionalism. The staff was knowledgeable and excited about working in this fine facility. In his own experience in dealing with the city, everyone was always professional, but they also care.

Ms. Sherman agreed, they got to experience that with the Sunrise Leadership Academy. They are always professional.

Ms. Andre said as a newcomer, she felt very welcome during the grand opening. Everything was so nice, she felt like a little kid in a candy store. She did not know the child sitting next to her, but started speaking with him and encouraging him to get some food and they had a great time. Later his father came over, and it was Commissioner Douglas. Ms. Andre added that she walks every morning and was visiting each park to get to know the city better.

VI. New Business

The board members decided that Mr. Fernandez would ask the interview questions.

Mr. Fernandez read the statement on the questionnaire, requesting Officer Hodgers' consent to the interview, and be recorded. He also informed Officer Hodgers that he could choose not to answer particular questions, if he decided not to. Officer Hodgers consented and understood.

The interview with School Resource Officer Ben Hodgers began.

A. Please state your full name?

Officer Benjamin Hodgers

B. Where were you born?

Nuremberg, Germany

C. When did you begin working for the City of Sunrise?

July 20, 1992

D. When did you begin serving as a School Resource officer?

August of 2008 or 2009

E. What are the qualifications needed to become a school resource officer in the City of Sunrise?

Officer Hodgers said when there is an opening for a school resource officer, the announcement is put out by the Chief of Police.

The officers submitting for the position have to be certified and not on probation. There is an oral interview before command staff and a civilian member of the staff, they then pick

who they pick the best candidate for the position. They asked about themselves, accomplishments, and how they would handle certain situations, such as active shooter, lockdown, etc. They gave the officers a missing persons scenario. There are eight elementary schools in Sunrise and inevitably there is a missing child, often because of a miscommunication such as carpooling, missed bus and things along that line.

F. What are the expectations and responsibilities of a School Resource Officer?

Officer Hodggers responded to protect and serve. To be there every day on time. The school resource officers work during school hours. Not all schools have the same hours, it varies with elementary, Franklin, middle and high school.

Mr. Howell what they do when school is not in session.

Officer Hodggers said they do road patrol or can schedule time off. Every officer goes through one week of block training each year. This consists of different things each year, such as requalification of firearms, CPR recertification, videos on law enforcement subjects, an Internal Affairs Lieutenant may come in with updates.

G. Aside from Sawgrass Elementary School, what other schools have you served as an SRO?

Sawgrass has been the only school he served at.

H. Do you supervise the Police Explorers? How long have you done that?

Officer Hodggers responded that he has been the coordinator for the Police Explorers for the past five years. He started in 2018. Officer Miles Robison, the former advisor for Explorers was a friend of his. He used to help Officer Robison out, and decided once he retired to take over the position.

Mr. Fernandez asked how many officers were involved with Police Explorers.

Officer Hodggers replied there was a meeting every Tuesday, and they had five or six advisers. The Explorers do a variety of things, such as live scenarios, they are involved with city events such as National Night Out and Pop Up Barbecues. There will be a Safety Town held on March 9th and the Explorers will be involved fingerprinting. They always participated in the July 4th parade, and much more.

Mr. Fernandez asked if Officer Hodggers would share the names of the other Police Officers involved with Explorers.

Officer Hodggers listed the advisers: Officer Baffuto, who was also an SRO at Banyan Elementary, Officer Yarborough, Officer Breed, and SRO at Horizon Elementary, Officer McCarthy, and Public Service Aide Andres Alsina.

Officer Hodggers said Police Explorers is open to residents that are ages 14-21. For 14-year old Explorers, they must have completed 8th grade and be in high school. When Explorers aged out of the program, most continue on as Public Service Aides and some have become Police Officers.

I. What other duties do you have in the City of Sunrise?

Officer Hodggers said he coordinated the car seat safety program. They have an event once a month at either Home Depot in the City, and install car seats in for people that need assistance with the proper installation.

J. When did you start the Panther Prowl run at Sawgrass Elementary?

Officer Hodggers said the first year he was at Sawgrass Elementary he presented the idea to the Principal Shari Rose, that was in August of 2008 or 2009.

K. What inspired you to start the Panther Prowl run?

Officer Hodggers replied it was a spin off from the Pembroke Lakes Elementary mini marathon that he participated in while attending that elementary school. That started him on a running career, his dad was also a runner. The students ran a four-mile mini marathon, and they could run with their parents. Some officers do different things in the community, and his responsibility was the kids. He thought what could he do to give back to these kids. He presented it also as a way for a good fundraiser. February 21st will be the 13th event at Sawgrass Elementary.

L. Who in the City of Sunrise and community has supported this event?

Officer Hodggers responded that parents, and everyone at the school. Mayor Ryan ran it a few times, as have various commissioners. The community loved it and he had parents that thank him for this, and are happy they get to participate in the event with their kids.

The PTA was a huge supporter of the event. Sarah Perry, mother of Aidan Perry has been an advocate of the event for years. As PTA president several years ago, she helped him take the event to the next level with electronic timing and awards. The PTA was huge supporter. Police and Fire Rescue is always there at the event. They close NW 8th Street from Key Lime to 133rd. Leisure Services Director Kevin Pickard and his staff helped with opening up the park, which is used for the race course. It is a real community effort.

Mr. Fernandez asked what Officer Hodggers did during the Panther Prowl?

Officer Hodggers said he runs the event. The race is two miles for 4th and 5th grade, one mile for 1st, 2nd and 3rd graders. Kindergarteners do one car loop. Girls run first and then the boys. Officer Hodggers runs the race with each group.

M. How has your service and experience affected your life?

Officer Hodggers explained that it was very different than he thought police work would be, especially as a school resource officer. He made many of friends and still spoke with many of the students that were still in the community, and parents too. Being in the school resource officer position was very rewarding.

N. What do you hope your legacy will be both professionally and personally?

Officer Hodggers hoped the Panther Prowl continued on after he retired. He was asked the same question by someone the other day. He responded that when he retired, he was not sure where he was going, but he would find the time when the Panther Prowl was happening to attend.

Mr. Shaw asked if there was an officer he worked with on the Panther Prowl that would take over for him.

Officer Hodggers was not sure. He coordinated all the officers and public service aides for the event.

Mr. Fernandez asked if Officer Hodggers could recommend any other officers in the department that would be beneficial to conduct an oral interview.

Ms. Sherman gave a brief overview of the museum area and about the video screens, which could be utilized for this kind of thing. They want to draft anyone in the city that they can, who can be highlighted for years to come. There are so many great programs and people.

Officer Hodggers knew there were some people that have done great things. There were also Sunrise residents that grew up in Sunrise with the desire or drive to become a police officer. Officer Baffuto was not only was a school resource officer, he was also involved with Explorers, and was a coach for football, basketball, and soccer. He knew a lot of kids. He had a student right now that was a senior in high school in Miami. Officer Hodggers coached him when he was younger, and he just signed to play football with the University of Miami.

Officer Hodggers said Lieutenant Craig Cardinale grew up in the City of Sunrise, and is retiring in five months. Once he graduated the Police Academy he became a school resource officer, and is now a lieutenant on the road patrol.

Mr. Fernandez asked if Officer Hodggers would be willing to bring in the photograph of himself in the mini marathon with his father.

Officer Hodggers replied in the affirmative, he would be happy to share it with Mr. Fernandez to digitize.

Mr. Howell asked if Officer Hodggers could you share any funny experiences, especially with parents.

Officer Hodggers said he made many friends at the school, especially parents. He said the thing that cemented him in the program was an event that took place on his first day. It was his first day, and he looked at all the kids in the cafeteria. There was a little boy crying, he went over and sat next to him. His name was Sebastian, and he wanted to be with his teacher. Officer Hodggers explained that she was in the teacher cafeteria. Sebastian calmed down and the teacher walked over and explained these kids came in as kindergarteners, everything was new and they really wanted to be home with their parents. As it got closer to the end of the day, Officer Hodggers was asked to be in the kindergarten area because it was chaotic. He walked over and it was very chaotic. Sebastian walked out and introduced his mom to Officer Ben, and said he was his new best friend. Officer Hodggers shared the story with his family that night. Every day after that, his daughter, who was in also in kindergarten at the time, wanted to know how Sebastian was. He shared that story with Mayor Ryan who has retold that story many times. Officer Hodggers knew after that, he was in the right place. He knew that was where he wanted to be. He went on to do the explorer program, the car seat program, he was also a high school cross country coach. He has been doing that for 12 years at West Broward High School in Pembroke Pines. He said that Mayor Ryan was a big supporter of the Panther Prowl.

The board thanked Officer Hodgers for the opportunity to interview him.

MOTION Mr. Fernandez moved to invite Craig Cardinale to come in for an interview. Seconded by Ms. Sherman. All in favor. The board said to check with him and try to accommodate his schedule as best as they can.

Mr. Fernandez asked if it was possible to get a photograph of each advisory board. Perhaps by a professional, such as the city photographer.

Deputy City Clerk Girard said she would check on that and reports back.

VII. Old Business

VIII. Adjournment

Seeing there was no further business to come before the Sunrise Historical Commission, the meeting adjourned at 4:52 p.m.

Meryl Girard, Deputy City Clerk