



MINUTES

Sunrise Historical Commission Meeting

Monday, June 10, 2024, 4:00 p.m.

Sunrise City Hall, Everglades Conference Room

10770 W. Oakland Park Blvd., Sunrise FL 33351

Meeting Agenda

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 - absent

Stacy Sherman - absent

Lt. Louis Berman, guest

Staff present:

Deputy City Clerk Meryl Girard

III. Open Discussion

No one was present.

IV. Approval of Minutes: May 13, 2024

MOTION A motion to approve the minutes of May 13, 2024 made by Mr. Howell was seconded by Ms. Andre. All were favor.

V. Follow Up Items

VI. New Business

A. Interview with Sunrise Police Lieutenant Louis Berman

Mr. Fernandez conducted the interview and read the following statement into the records before he began with the questions.

This is the City of Sunrise Historical Commission conducting an interview with Lieutenant Louis Berman at the City of Sunrise City Hall 10770 W Oakland Park Blvd, Sunrise, FL 33351 on June 10, 2024. Lt. Berman, do we have your permission to record this interview?

Lt. Berman gave his permission.

1. Please state your full name.

Lt. Berman responded Louis Berman.

2. When did you come to Broward County? Why? With whom?

Lt. Berman said he came to Broward in 1973 with his parents, Louis and Katherine Berman. Initially, his father came to Hollywood for work, he was in construction. His father was followed by his mother and the four boys. His sister was born in Broward.

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

Lt. Berman began working for the City of Sunrise in 1993 as a Police Service Aide. He chose to be a Police Service Aide because he wanted to work for Sunrise. At the time they were not hiring police officers. He initially spoke with former employee Mike Hall who told him that officers often start as service aides, then progress. He served as a Public Service Aide for one year and nine months. The applications opened for officers, and everyone knew him by then. He was hired as a police officer and attended the Broward County Police Academy in Davie.

Mr. Howell asked if he could speak about his experience at the Police Academy as a cadette.

Lt. Berman said it was five months of learning, and he loved it. They taught many different skills.

Mr. Howell said he participated in the Sunrise Residents Police Academy. Lt. Berman said his daughter did as well. Mr. Howell asked how he would describe what they gave him in the academy beyond handcuffs.

Lt. Berman responded he learned to be nice, to be fair, and have some empathy. Not everyone needed handcuffs. They were meeting a lot of people on the worst day of their life, they needed to have some empathy. He learned this early in his police work.

4. Who were the most important people in the Sunrise community during your employment?

Lt. Berman said the first person that really took him under his wing was Sgt. Charlie Vitale. He also had history in the city with relatives that worked in the city. He knew within the first two to three years that he wanted to be a detective, and Sgt. Vitale steered him in that direction. Sgt. Vitale knew what was important and what needed to be done, such as the little things, you had to look at everything in totality. Lt. Berman watched and observed Sgt. Vitale and knew that was what he wanted to do. He saw how analytical Sgt. Vitale was. There were so many people that you wanted to make happy, the victim, the state's attorney, even the criminal. Also, Sgt.

Jimmy Hughes, Lt. Bob Dorn, to name a few, were very instrumental in his career. He took a few pieces of each person along the way.

Lt. Berman said when you made detective that spotlighted you for the next position, and you worked your way up to through the ranks; sergeant, lieutenant, etc.

Mr. Fernandez asked when Lt. Berman became a Sergeant. He said it was around 2000-2001, then Lieutenant in 2008 or 2009 under Chief Brooks. Chief Brooks taught him about the next level and administrative work.

Chairperson Ginsburg Cohen asked if someone could advance past Lieutenant. Lt. Berman responded major, deputy chief or even Chief of Police

Lt. Berman said once he did a ride along, he was hooked. He told his parents he wanted to become a police officer, and his mother did not want him to do it.

Mr. Fernandez asked about Lt. Berman's education.

Lt. Berman went to Florida International University for undergraduate studies, and majored in criminal justice. He received his Masters Degree in criminology from Florida State University fourteen years ago.

Mr. Howell asked if he could describe how his degrees helped with his profession, such as looking at a crime.

Lt. Berman responded drugs; demand and supply. Fortunately, Sunrise is not on the map for drugs. He said there were so many basic traffic stops, and then there were drugs discovered in the car. The person stopped could either tell where the drugs came from or get arrested. Cases were often handed off to the drug unit. All these types of warrants were done by the SWAT unit. It was very serious business.

5. What position in the city did you like the best? Please explain.

Lt. Berman said being the Lieutenant in the Detective Division. You were in charge, and ran the daily operations. The bigger the case, the more challenging it was for him. There were 15-16 detectives, some were new, some were not. There were always different ways of looking at the case. The biggest thing was who you spoke with first. There were so many steps. You could watch a TV show and see a case was wrapped up in an hour, it was not like that in real life. It took time. DNA had been around since the 1980's and came so far since then, including touch DNA. They swabbed everyone, it was not mandatory, and had to be voluntary.

Mr. Fernandez asked how long it would take to solve a case in the late 1990's versus today.

Lt. Berman said you could have a DNA result within three days now. DNA testing goes through the Broward Sheriff's Office. They are not the only agency working with DNA. If it were a high-profile case, they have the ability to get it rushed through. Often the State's Attorney wanted more evidence than just DNA. Lt. Berman said people go to 7-11 and buy a cheap phone, that is how they catch someone. Everyone called the same group of people. A pattern developed. They got a warrant for the person's phone, got the information, and then they had the burner phone.

6. Which position did you like the least? Please explain.

Lt. Berman answered that he never felt like he had a bad spot. He was able to steer his career away from things he did not like. He was not a policy writing kind of guy who sat at a desk. He was a field man. He had so many stories, and told them to the new guys. They have had so many suspects they have gotten. Elderly fraud was a big problem. He spoke about a resident, a woman who bought her home in 1961 on Sunset Strip, she called him a few weeks ago. He had met her ten years ago and she kept his business card. She had been the victim of fraud, when someone knocked on her door about repairing her roof. She gave them a check and had mis-dated it. The bank would not cash it. Lt. Berman called Detective Burstein, who called the bank and they stopped payment on the check. They called the suspect, told him to return the money and he did. They put out a county-wide bulletin, because if he was doing that in Sunrise, he was doing it in other locations.

7. How has the City of Sunrise changed within your lifetime?

Lt. Berman said his family lived in Sunrise. They celebrated every July 4th at the Ballpark. His grandparents were active at St. Bernard's Church, including the carnival. There was a lot of fishing in Sunrise, because there was nothing out here. The canals were loaded with fish. It was the place to hang out in Sunrise, Carvel on 64th and Sunset Strip. He coached in the City of Sunrise. His daughter was 30 and he coached the girls' softball team, as well as basketball and flag football. He never coached soccer, because it was played in the fall when there were extra details for police officers.

Lt. Berman said he lived in Welleby, one of his children attended Franklin Academy, and his son went to All Saints.

Mr. Howell asked about the changes in living conditions and how has that changed with children.

Lt. Berman said in the 1980s maybe some kids stole a candy bar. Now kids steal vapes. That was the new thing. In the 1980s they stole candy, cigarettes, there were more robberies then, before the internet. The kids still did stupid things, probably what they were stealing was different. Kids broke into cars. They left cars on cinderblocks and stole the tires. They had it down to a matter of minutes to do this.

Mr. Howell said the number one crime in their area was stolen tires.

Lt. Berman said there was crime everywhere, it was the level of the crime. Sunrise was not immune to crime. They were in the bottom of number of crimes. Some cities have crimes every week.

Mr. Howell asked how Sunrise provided support to the police.

Lt. Berman responded that Chief Brooks turned the tide on that 100%. Through grant funds they were able to purchase things like the bear cat. They received great support, so they can get the equipment they have. They got rifles after Stoneman Douglas. He spoke about the incident with the FBI officer at Reflections Apartments. They got a lot of support from the City Commission. He was driving a Chevy Tahoe SUV, he used to drive a Capri with one light on top.

Lt. Berman said he spoke at the Broward College Police Academy frequently, and one of the questions he was asked a lot was what were the changes since you started? He responded that technology was number one. The equipment the officers carry, such as body cameras, tasers, vests, etcetera, was among the other changes.

Mr. Howell asked about the support they get from other agencies.

Lt. Berman said the goal was to get the bad guy and give the victims some peace. Since Chief Brooks came to Sunrise, they had a go and get them policy, this was followed by Chief Rosa and now Chief Ransone. Community policing also had a large presence.

Lt. Berman asked if anyone had a tour of the Public Safety Complex. Maybe that could be set up. The City did not have to pay for a shooting range, because they have one on site, that came from drug confiscation money. Other law enforcement agencies used it every week.

Lt. Berman spoke about active shooter training. You do not wait. This changed since the Marjorie Stoneman Douglas shooting. You go right in, if you can save one life, and every life matters. He said these are sick individuals, they watch crimes on television, and they copycat it. He did not like the criminal's names being put on tv, because that was what they wanted. Speak about the victims, not the criminals.

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

Lt. Berman felt he was not the same person that he was in 1995. He was a normal guy. Was he able to forget all the bad things? No, you just dealt with it. Some people were okay to talk about it, but he preferred not to.

Mr. Fernandez asked how has mental health support changed.

Lt. Berman said the city had an anonymous employee assistance program, the availability of that was helpful. He said that was the second biggest change he had seen, technology and mental health support. They regularly had debriefings with a chaplain. They had a debriefing with the chaplain after a detective recently was shot.

Who was the first chief you started with?

Lt. Berman listed the chiefs. The first one was Chief Soldenwagner then Chief Jerry Blough, he went to the City of Margate to become their chief and later became their city manager. Next was Chief Boyett, he came from Oklahoma. Lt. Berman said he did not deal with him much because he was out on the road. Then Chief Brooks came. That was a big turning point for the city. He came as an interim chief and then was hired as the full time chief. He could have gone anywhere with his credentials. Next was Chief Rosa, and now Chief Ransone.

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

Lt. Berman said he had been reflecting recently about the years. There were pictures of retired Police Officers on the wall at the Public Safety Complex. He listened to stories told about those officers over the years. He hoped that his picture was included one day, and his stories were told. That was something important to him. That is why he went back to midnights to teach the new recruits.

10. Is there anything we didn't talk about that you would like to add?

Ms. Clough Robinson said professionally she does behavior therapy and they have ethics that they were bound to. Preserving dignity and integrity was very important. She spoke about the circle around his badge. Law meant safeguard of freedom.

Lt. Berman said without laws they had chaos.

Ms. Clough Robinson said Lt. Berman was someone who was passionate about what he did, and asked how he decompressed.

Lt. Berman responded he went fishing. He spent a lot of time with his kids. Even with working many hours, he always found quality time to spend with his children. As far as the ethical part went, your parents started you off with that. You had a good heart. Not everyone does things the same way, you did it right and in a certain way, so you could sleep at night. There was not a need to be a tough guy 100% of the time. When someone made a mistake, did it have to be put on paper to affect their career? Sometimes a talking to is what was needed.

Ms. Clough Robinson asked what Lt. Berman would put in a handbook if he could write it.

Lt. Berman responded community policing, every component of police work, a little bit of everything. If there were problems in neighborhoods, they had to be taken care of, the little things before they became big things. Zero tolerance, sometimes you had to do it.

Mr. Howell said Lt. Berman spoke about something at the beginning of the meeting, that criminals had rights.

Lt. Berman said it was fundamental to law enforcement. There was a system in the country and you hoped justice prevailed. At one time he had \$1.6 million dollars in his hand, and had to make sure it was counted and put away. You weed out the people who should not be cops. They just hired six people who will start next week.

Mr. Fernandez said to please let the board know if he can think of other people they could interview.

The board members thanked Lt. Berman for coming in for the interview and wished him the best of luck with his upcoming retirement.

VII. Old Business

VIII. Adjournment

Seeing there was no further business to come before the board, the meeting adjourned at 5:15 p.m.

Meryl Girard, Deputy City Clerk