

**COMMISSION
AGENDA MEMORANDUM**

Item No. 9a

BRIEFING ITEM

Date of Meeting June 30, 2020

DATE: June 25, 2020

TO: Port of Seattle Commissioners

FROM: Eric Schinfeld, Senior Manager, Federal & International Government Relations
Veronica Valdez, Commission Specialist

SUBJECT: Community Forum on Port Policing

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A broad consensus has formed in the United States that a close examination of current policing practices is necessary and urgent. The Port of Seattle has the responsibility during this critical moment in history to ensure that our Police Department is held to the highest nationwide standards achievable for public safety, protection of civil rights, equity, accountability and oversight.

While much of the Port of Seattle Police Department's primary function is in service to port-owned facilities and the unique requirements of international aviation and maritime activities, public safety remains at the core of its mission. In addition, Port Police also provide mutual aid requests to other jurisdictions, when needed.

The Port can lead by example, by embracing the need for a thorough review, and by acting swiftly and meaningfully in identifying and acting upon areas for improvement.

BACKGROUND

The tragic killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Manuel Ellis, Rayshard Brooks and Ahmaud Arbery are only some of the most recent in a long history of unjust killings of Black Americans at the hands of police, reflecting a deeply disturbing pattern of systemic racism in our country that continues to severely impact our cities, communities and essential institutions.

Over the past few weeks, hundreds of thousands across our nation gathered to protest, and continue to protest, the unjust death of George Floyd, and the tolerance of racism by our communities and institutions. The cruelty and callousness of these deaths is abhorrent to a just and civil society. Recent demonstrations organized by groups in our community and around the country and world have offered people an opportunity to share their pain, heal, organize, and demand immediate action for broad social change, and to end systemic racism in policing and beyond.

Meeting Date: March 24, 2020

The Port of Seattle relies on a diverse and inclusive workforce to accomplish our work for a better future. Respect for one another is a Port core value. The Port must therefore take responsibility by doing its part to respond to the call of history at this seminal moment.

In light of the national movement to reexamine policing within our communities and in accordance with the Port’s Century Agenda goal to “Become a Model for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion,” a review of the policies, practices and oversight of the Port of Seattle Police is fully appropriate. On June 30, the Port of Seattle Commission will direct a comprehensive assessment of the Port of Seattle Police Department’s policies, protocols and procedures impacting issues of diversity, equity and civil rights, in order to develop recommendations for action. In addition, the Commission will authorize the creation of a Commission Task Force on Port Policing and Civil Rights. Based on the work of the Task Force, the Port will issue a set of recommendations and a plan for ensuring that the work of the Port Police is transparent and accountable to community members and is fostering safe, healthy communities.

On June 23, Executive Director Metruck announced publicly that he would use his authority to direct the Acting Port of Seattle Police Chief to take immediate actions on this topic, including an immediate ban on use of vascular or airway neck restraints; mandates related to diversity on Police hiring evaluation panels; disqualifications of Police officer applicants based on a substantiated finding of the use of excessive force against a member of the public, or a substantiated finding of racial discrimination against another employee; requirements for de-escalation, “bystander” intervention and anti-discrimination training and other items.

The embrace of reforms in police departments around the country has shown how adapting policies based on values of civil society, social justice, and the best available science can reduce the incidence of violence in encounters between members of the community and police. It must be stated that the Port of Seattle Police have not been implicated in the kinds of tragic events that are the focus of local and nationwide protests. In spite of that record of strong public service to the community, the work of the task force less urgent and necessary, and will broadly benefit the Port, the communities we serve, and users of Port facilities.

ATTACHMENTS TO THIS BRIEFING

- (1) Draft Motion – Directing a Comprehensive Assessment of the Port of Seattle Police Department