



Citizens Advisory Committee Minutes

Wednesday, May 10, 2023

Location: via: Zoom

Attendance:

New Jersey: Reggie Haynes, Alan Becker, Judy Boldurian, Steve Benigno, Bruce Schwartz, Ben Saracco

Pennsylvania: Daniel Norfleet, Scott Cohen, Tyrone Wesley, Bob Melikian

Emeritus Member(s): Dan McArdle

Potential Member(s): Thomas Hofacker

DRPA/PATCO: John Hanson, CEO; Jim White, CFO; John Rink, CE; Ed Cobbs, Chief of Police; John Santry, Police Lieutenant; Adam Jacurak, Engineering; Barbara Wagner, Executive Assistant

Public Member(s):

Call to Order

A motion was made to approve the May 10, 2023 minutes. The minutes were approved.

CEO, John Hanson

CEO Hanson reported that, in accordance with an e-mail that was received by Bruce Schwartz, it is not our policy to discuss or provide details on suicides beyond what is available in the Board Packets, so you are free to research the Packet or make a Public Records Request.

CEO Hanson stated that we are certainly open to receiving suggestions about Suicide Prevention if you choose to make any, but in terms of providing any details, we only provide what is in the Board Packet.

Steve Benigno asked if the DRPA is subject to any regulatory reporting for suicides?

Chief Cobbs reported that we are not subject to any regulatory reporting. CEO Hanson added that we report the numbers in the Board Packet. Chief Cobbs and GM Rink added that there are requirements as it relates to PATCO under NTD and FDA. GM Rink reported that PATCO has to file that data with the NTD (National Transit Database). CEO Hanson reiterated that we have a requirement under PATCO that we report, and we report the numbers in the Board Packet that is provided once a month. The average range annually is from 4-10 per year, but usually on the lower end of that scale.

Scott Cohen asked if those numbers include PATCO and the DRPA as a whole?

CEO Hanson reported that it is PATCO/trains and the DRPA/bridges together.

Police Department Improvisational Training:

CEO Hanson reported that Chief Cobbs and Lieutenant Santry provided an update to the Board on the latest training that we have given our Police Department. It was a collaboration between our Police Department and our Strategic Initiatives Department. It involved didactic training and the use of applied theatrical and comedic improvisational skills. The same type of training that we have been using for our Executive Leadership and our Middle Management Leadership. We extended the training to our Police Department in four sessions for each of our four police platoons. Mr. Becker attended the meeting and asked if Lt. Santry and Chief Cobbs would give the same overview to the CAC Committee.

Chief Cobbs stated that he appreciates the invitation from the CAC Committee and looks forward to enhancing the relationship between the Police Department and the CAC. He reported that he currently serves as the Police Chief for the DRPA. He is a 30-year veteran with experience in bridge operations and transit operations. Chief Cobbs stated that we are a highly trained Police Department, and we continually evaluate and re-evaluate our training curriculum. We also believe that through our training and education, we enhance the growth and development of our personnel. We attended the training described by CEO Hanson and we truly believe that, internally, it was a unique opportunity for our officers. The training opportunity was welcomed, and we look forward to continuing these types of training opportunities moving forward.

Lt. Santry (who oversees Professional Standards for the Police Department) reported that there are only two things that cops hate – change and the way things are. In 2020, as the country began lockdowns to flatten the curve, the murder of George Floyd sparked demonstrations and protests through which people expressed frustration and distrust of American Law Enforcement. The overall message to anyone who was listening became clear – change now. As a result, the term de-escalation not only entered the American Police lexicon, but it also became the predominant word in our vocabulary. Since then, our focus was to study and train on de-escalation. It was during this de-escalation when CEO Hanson proposed a new training program to be spear-headed by Christina Maroney and Nick Gillette. CEO Hanson proposed and incorporated improvisation or Improv into police training as a tool to help communication and de-escalation.

Lt. Santry stated that he was worried, and I was concerned because our officers had reached a point of diminishing returns regarding the de-escalation training, and I thought this might be more of the same. I thought that CEO Hanson's project might fail. Honestly, to me, police officers and Improv did not seem like a formula destined for success.

Christina Maroney, Nick Gillette, Sergeant Dolly and I began to collaborate. We met to discuss our goals and to review previous and ongoing DRPA police training. Christina and Nick even attended a portion of Sgt. Dolly's resiliency program training to hear a powerful presentation by one of our retired officers. Shortly thereafter, Christina and Nick developed a lesson plan, and the training was set for March of 2023. Subsequently, each Tuesday in March, the entire platoon of 25 to 30 officers of all ranks assembled on the 11th floor Multipurpose Room at OPC. I opened each session with a very brief introduction, Christina explained the background and purpose of the training, then Nick went on to handle the bulk of the lesson plan.

The next presentation was not what the officers were used to. Nick relied little on PowerPoint slides instead kept the class engaged and active with Improv exercises to which the officers learned and practiced the primary objectives of the lesson. Nick selected exercises which integrated skills from the book never splitting the difference by a retired FBI negotiator, Chris Voss. This kept the exercises grounded and relevant. While the levels of enthusiasm varied, participation in the Improv exercises was 100 percent. I watched proudly as leaders and senior members of the department step-up to participate setting an example for newer officers to follow. Nick managed the classroom with gentle persuasion and handled challenging students in a non-judgmental and empathetic leader.

Artfully, he was simply leading by example as we played catch with imaginary objects and as a group we lifted and moved an imaginary heavy rock. With eyes closed we were led around the 11th floor at OPC by our brother and sister officers and we acted out improvised scenes and pretended to be subject matter experts. While they may not have admitted it, our officers had fun and while they may not have realized it, they were learning. Having attended all four sessions, I was most fascinated by the growth and development phase of training. During the segments, Nick asked the classroom several questions about what needed to change. In each of the sessions, this phase allowed the officers to vent about the challenges and frustrations they face every day. In this phase, invariably, it became a mock interaction between the officers, the public represented by Nick, the DRPA Leadership represented by Christina, and the Department Leadership represented by me and other senior members in the room.

Most often, these complaints were centered around their repeated encounters with homeless individuals and people with emotional disorders. To be clear, their frustration comes from the lack of real usable resources or programs to fix these issues and not from the people they encounter. I believe this cathartic interaction was therapeutic. In some sense it gave them the opportunity to be heard. Most importantly, it gave the officers an opportunity to propose needed changes. Nick closed with the question, "what will you do to see that happen?" In each class, this final question calls for a long silence as the realization set in that each member of the department was being called upon to be an agent for positive change.

In closing, I can tell you that this training provided education, reinforcement of critical communication skills, and vital interaction between members of the Police Department and OPC in keeping with the transparency goals of CEO Hanson, Chief Safety Security Officer Finnegan, and Chief Cobbs. The feedback from the course evaluation submitted was overwhelmingly positive. Most notably, the opportunity to train together as a platoon was very positive. Even though the members of the platoons work the same shift hours, they rarely have the opportunity to work or train as a group.

Lt. Santry thanked CEO Hanson, Christina Maroney, Nick Gillette, Chief Safety Security Officer Finnegan, and Chief Cobbs for allowing him the opportunity to contribute in a small way toward the development and implementation of this unique training program for empowering individual members of the department to change the way things are.

CEO Hanson added that we felt very positive about the level of training that our police have. As Lt. Santry stated, our police officers are extremely well trained and we are very proud of our Police Department, the work they do, and the way that they do it. At DRPA and PATCO, the new command staff that has assembled under Chief Cobbs is focused even more on our mission, vision, and values, and I am very proud of the open-mindedness with which this was approached. Not only did it add a dimension to their training in areas of empathy, the idea of training in platoons and having representatives of management, the command staff, and surrogates for the public, brought our Police Department closer together with the rest of the team and the community. The department is headed to an even better level of excellence.

Alan Becker thanked CEO Hanson, Chief Cobbs, and Lt. Santry for joining the CAC tonight. The Board received Lt. Santry's presentation very well and he thought the committee would love to hear what you have to say and bring it to our attention. Bob Melikian added that the presentation was well written and appreciates Lt. Santry's candor.

Recap of the 2 field trips (Franklin Square Station and Ben Franklin Lighting Ceremony)

CEO Hanson reported that the Franklin Square trip was very interesting. We had a lot of staff, including our Chief Engineer, Principal Engineer, as well as people from our Consulting Group. GM Rink added that the trip was very well attended by CAC members. We've had a tour before we started the work at Franklin Square so some might have been on both tours to see the difference in the progress and construction. Adam Jacurak added that the project was still on schedule for next year.

CEO Hanson reported that the Lighting Event at the Ben Franklin Bridge was a great event. It's a tremendous system and was great to see so many CAC members there. The lights on the north side of the system are now working and it will be close to two years before the south side will be working because of the work that is underway.

Does Chairwoman Cherelle Parker's current run for Philadelphia Mayor's race create a conflict for DRPA? Since Governor Wolf appointed Chairwoman Parker, will Governor Shapiro replace her or make other changes to the DRPA Board?

CEO Hanson reported that Chairwoman Parker's run for Mayor does not create a conflict for the DRPA. It is conceivable that it may cause an issue here or there, but that's not uncommon. We have now, and in the past, had several elected officials on the Board. In fact, we have two ex-officio members, the Auditor General elected in PA and the Treasurer of PA. In the past, we also had various City Councilmen and State Senators on the Board. Vice Chairman Nash is a County Commissioner, and this does not create any conflicts. If there is a specific issue where there's a conflict, it will be handled appropriately.

CEO Hanson stated that Chairwoman Parker will remain on the Board unless she chooses not to. When she is eventually elected Mayor, she may decide that it's more than what she wants to handle, but that will be her decision. Governors Corbett and Rendell both chaired the Board at one time, so it's conceivable that she will remain. It's also possible that the Governor will make changes, but the Governors don't usually share that information until they've acted, and we receive a letter. He stated that he doubts very much that there will be any change to the Chair.

Possible CAC meeting when the Board schedules a live evening meeting.

CEO Hanson reported that we certainly can schedule a live evening meeting. We would have to work with the Chair to discuss when it happens, but I'm not aware of any plans at this time. Many of our Board members still attend virtually, although more and more are coming back in-person lately.

CFO, Jim White

Finance Update (Ridership, Toll Revenue as compared to pre-COVID):

CFO White reported that lately we have been seeing an increase in traffic patterns, PATCO ridership, and revenues. We are up around 6 percent in traffic, which is unaudited through April, however, if you look at the audited numbers, we are up around 10 percent (thru February). There are two reasons: we had a very mild winter this year versus 2022, and in 2022, the Omicron variant hit the country hard in the November through February time frame causing depressed numbers for PATCO and the DRPA. I have a sense that our traffic is roughly one to two percent above where it is after you take out all those factors.

During the last couple of months, we have been between 91-93 percent of pre-COVID volumes. It seems we have a new normal that is 5-10 percent below 2019, and we have been in that pattern for almost two years. I don't see traffic increasing significantly in the near future and as a result, we budgeted extremely conservatively when we approached the 2023 new year.

CFO White reported that PATCO was showing some signs of getting closer to the 49-50 percent range. There were a few weeks where we went over 50 percent of pre-COVID, but it seems to have settled back into a 46-50 percent range, which looks like the new normal unless something very unexpected happens. Mostly, it relates to remote working and there aren't as many people coming back, particularly, on the Philadelphia side. PATCO fare revenue is approximately \$50K above 2022 and the DRPA tolls are at least 5 percent or above. We have reached a leveling in both traffic and ridership.

Additionally, John and I are keeping an eye on personnel costs and expenses. If you look at the DRPA and PATCO budgets, at least 70 percent of our budget is comprised of personnel and employee service expenses. We have been keeping a tight rein on personnel costs. Usually from January to March, it takes a while for the expenses to ramp up because it takes a while to get the purchase orders out, etc. We are around \$6M (below budget) when you look at the combined budgets. Last year, we ended the year around 7-10 percent ahead of plan, so we are continuing the trend of being under budget and have been under budget, successfully, for a long period of time.

CFO White reported that every month, CEO Hanson, Deputy CEO Parker, CE Venuto, and I meet to look at the capital expenditures. In some cases, capital expenditures are a little lower than they were last year. During the past four months, it's averaged around \$8.1M. Our capital budget for this year is approximately \$147M and it was about that last year. We are probably at least \$20-30M below that number. The combination of more revenues, less expenses on the operating side, and less capital expenditures results in a General Fund that's very stable and a little bit ahead of where we expected it to be. The General Fund is where our excess resides, and the balances can be used for any lawful purpose. For the most part, the General Fund funds the PATCO subsidy and the capital expenditures since we exhausted our bond project funds about 2 years ago.

Alan Becker asked if we are doing well with our bond coverage?

CFO White reported that there are several things the rating agencies look at and there are certain certifications that we have to make towards the end of every year indicating that we have sufficient revenues to equal or exceed the net revenue requirement. We've done very well because the traffic and revenues have been up the last couple of years. However, in 2020, CEO Hanson and I were very concerned if traffic did not recover because it would have put us in a tenuous situation in meeting that number. Fortunately, by the end of the year, we were above \$20-30M above where we needed to be.

He added that the rating agencies also look at days outstanding and liquidity which is another factor that we had even though the Authority had \$264M to fund the capital program. We are still trying to keep roughly \$100-150M liquidity by the end of each year in case anything unexpected happens. If we were ever in a situation and we never have been, where we couldn't pay bond service (which is principal and interest), there is a reserve that would cover one year's worth of principal and interest. There are several coverages that we look at and we are in good shape related to those coverages because traffic and revenue came back. Until the beginning of this year, we received \$84M from the Federal Government for operating grants. We still get Capital Grants from the FTA and other agencies. The (transit) operating grants helped us to offset the PATCO subsidy in the amount of \$84.4M, which helped stabilize the General Fund during the last couple of years.

Alan Becker asked, if the government goes into default on June 1, would that affect our income through Federal Grants?

CFO White reported that we received approximately \$20-30M in Federal Grants. CEO Hanson added that we don't receive a lot of money from the Federal Government, but we did receive the \$20-30M that was mentioned by CFO White. Some of that money has already been spent, but the Authority is not dependent on funding from the Federal Government or the State. However, there is some talk that we could fall into a recession and that could, potentially, have a major impact on the economy. CFO added that would have the biggest impact on the Authority if there was an extended situation that would cause layoffs in Philadelphia or the Port District region.

Bruce Schwartz asked if traffic and revenue remains indefinitely, does that affect your ability to maintain the bridges in perpetuity?

CFO White reported that the Authority's funding model will be sufficient for a number of years. \$260M will fund the DRPA and PATCO for two years; however, our funding model will go beyond that. Over time, when we put the budgets together, we tend to be very conservative and take the approach that we're at a new normal, so we are not overestimating. To the extent we run into some issues, there are some projects that could be delayed but we're not going to delay anything that will compromise the safety and security of the facilities. If we have a decent General Fund, we are in pretty good shape for at least 2-3 years.

CEO Hanson added that we believe, in the next year or two, we will have a toll and fare increase, coupled with the idea that one whole tranche of debt in the amount of \$45M, annually, rolls off in 2026. The combination means that we should be good until 2029-2030.

Bruce Schwartz asked if tolls would have to be increased beyond the rate of inflation to make up for lost revenue.

CEO Hanson stated that if you consider the rate of inflation over the last 13 years, which is the last time we had a toll increase, then we will be below the rate of inflation. If you're considering an annual rate of inflation, tolls will go up \$1.00 for passengers and that is 20 percent. CEO Hanson stated that, hopefully, we will not see any annual rates approaching 20 percent, but you are looking at a 20 percent increase most likely.

CFO White added that we also have a biennial calculation that is based on a CPI Index that would allow us to increase tolls. Looking at that calculation, it suggests that we could have implemented going above a dollar several years ago. That gives you a little more context as to what has been happening regarding the inflation rate.

Steve Benigno asked, in relation to reserves at \$260M, is there an additional rainy-day fund for the Port Authority?

CFO White reported that if we have issues related to debt service, there is roughly \$100M that would be covered if any emergencies came up. Before dipping into those reserves, we would use the General Fund which is where our excess is housed.

Steve Benigno asked if the Authority had a line of credit.

CFO White reported the Authority does not have any lines of credit. CEO Hanson added that it's two funds: the General Fund and the Debt Service Reserve Fund which is dedicated exclusively to the debt service.

Steve Benigno asked if there was any impact on the finances of the state during the last two banking failures?

CEO Hanson reported the answer is no because we only use state banks, and it hasn't impacted any of the banks we do business with.

Engineer Department, Adam Jacurak

Solar Project Update:

Adam Jacurak reported that the panels and the system are up and running. We have noticed how it's affecting the system, but we will need a full year's worth of data to realize how much it has improved; however, we have noticed that it is helping.

Update on the Ben Franklin Bridge pedestrian waterfront walkway (the proposal to connect Wiggins and Cooper Point Parks):

Adam Jacurak reported that the Camden County Community signed a design contract with the firm STV. We will have our representatives help with that project, but the project has just started.

Suicide Prevention Sign numbers (1-800-273-8255 and 9-8-8) have a small font size. Is it possible to increase the font size to make it easier to read?

GM Rink reported that we had signs in all the stations and on the bridges. Last July, they went to 9-8-8 so we put the new decal on all our signs. Earlier this year, the FTA put out an advisory outlining what they want on the signs. Accordingly, we used the 9-8-8 toolkit that comes from SAMSA which is the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration from the Government. They provided the tool kit and designs with the appropriate information that was included. We redesigned our signs based on the toolkit, and they are currently being made by our sign shop at the Walt Whitman Bridge that make all our metal aluminum signs that you see throughout the facilities. The signs are currently being manufactured and once we receive them, we will start putting the signs up in our stations and on the bridges.

GM, John Rink

PATCO update:

What is the in-service date for the Camden City Hall elevator?

Adam Jacurak reported that the City Hall elevator had an inspection walk through with our contractor and CM Services. We are hoping to get all the minor work that needs to be completed to get the elevator up and running as soon as possible. We're hoping to have it done within the next week or two before the Memorial Day Weekend.

Update on the Walter Rand Transportation Center redesign project.

GM Rink reported that there is no update on the Walter Rand Transportation Center design project. New Jersey Transit hasn't had any follow-up meetings and there has been no progress on the preliminary design. We have been involved with the Broadway Station and our Police Headquarters in the building, along with our Revenue Collection Department.

Update on the GCL project:

Adam Jacurak reported that the GCL project continues for the preliminary engineering design phase of the project. We are expecting the 10 percent design sometime within the fourth quarter or towards the end of this year. Field work is currently being done consisting of surveying traffic counts, measuring noise along the route, and working on the environmental survey. We are coordinating with Conrail and the project partners which include New Jersey Transit and South Jersey Transit Authority regarding the project ownership and funding. We are also working with the Federal Railroad Administration regarding the types of vehicles it can operate on a shared use corridor and going through the quiet zones, as well.

Social Media, Larry Davis

None.

Old Business:

Upcoming Advance Notice on Public Events:

GM Rink reported that, hopefully, the elevators at City Hall and the 12th/13th stations will be in service for the public. At that point, PATCO will be fully accessible throughout the entire system, but there will be no ribbon cutting.

New Business:

DRPA CAC Board Nominations:

Reggie Haynes was approved for another one-year term as Chair of the CAC.
Alan Becker was approved for another one-year term as Vice Chair of the CAC.
Pamela Mack-Brooks was approved as Secretary to the CAC for a one-year term.

Reggie Haynes stated that the committee will discuss the members going Emeritus in the beginning of 2024 at a time closer to the end of the year.

Judy Boldurian was approved as an active member by the Audit Committee on March 15, 2023. Her term will end in 2029.

Reggie Haynes reported that Marty King recently resigned from the committee effective May 4, 2023 due to work commitments that have changed making him unable to continue on the committee.

New CAC Members:

Thomas Hofacker gave a brief statement to the CAC. He stated that he has been riding PATCO since he was 17 years old. During that time, he has seen a lot of changes, especially during the pandemic. He sent a lot of e-mails to the people at PATCO to see what could be done and to help with some of the issues that are in the stations. Mr. Hofacker uses the Lindenwold Station to 15th/16th.

Members transitioning to Emeritus Status:

Bruce Schwartz and Daniel Norfleet will be transitioning to Emeritus Status at the end of June 2023.

Pamela Mack-Brooks will be transitioning to Emeritus Status in September 2024.

For the Good of the Order:

Next CAC Meeting: Will be held via Zoom on June 14, 2023, at 6:00 p.m.

Next DRPA Board Meeting: Will be held virtually on May 17, 2023, at 9:00 a.m.