

**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TACOMA-PIERCE COUNTY  
OBSERVER REPORT**

**CITY OF TACOMA CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING, JANUARY 25, 2021**

REGARDING POLICE PLOWING INTO CROWD ON 9TH & PACIFIC ON JANUARY 23, 2021

Video meeting

LWVTPC Observer: Lydia Zepeda

**PRESENT:** Victoria Woodards, Chris Beale, Keith Blocker, John Hines, Lillian Hunter, Conor McCarthy, Robert Thoms, Catherine Ushka, Kristina Walker

City Manager Elizabeth Pauli and police Chief Ake

**CALLED TO ORDER: 4:35 pm**

**Interim Chief Ake**

**Saturday, South 9th and Pacific**

Street racing incidents in the area are advertised on social media for rapid gathering and dispersal. There was a 911 call that the intersection was blocked on 9th and Pacific Ave. A patrol car was surrounded and individuals hit the vehicle with their hands. The officer put the car in reverse and then drove forward, hitting bystanders. The officer stopped at the 700 block and called for medical aid. Two people went to hospital. It was designated a deadly force incident.

Ake addressed the following questions about the incident:

- Why are the facts limited? The incident has to be investigated first.
- Why no arrests of racers? It was a chaotic scene; the police did not have capacity to make arrests. When back-up arrived the racers had all left.
- Why an independent review? To understand the motives of the officer, and for full transparency.
- Why is it handled as deadly force? Because of the size of the vehicle.
- When will we know more? There will be a weekly press release.
- When will the officer's name be released? It was released in the last hour.  
(Officer Khanh Phan, 58 years old, a member of TPD for 29 years)
- When will the city take action? We must wait until the investigation is complete.

**Two demonstration Events followed:**

**Saturday Demonstration**

The scene at 9th and Pacific was treated as a crime scene. Demonstrators showed up but the police needed to expand the crime scene to the 700 block where the officer had parked his vehicle. So demonstrators had to be moved from the crime scene area. Pierce County Use of Force Team (PCFUT) is conducting the independent investigation. Demonstrators were told they needed to leave and refused. There were several warnings. Two demonstrators who refused to leave the expanded crime scene area were arrested.

**Sunday Demonstration**

There was a planned demonstration. Police were advised that people outside Tacoma were planning to come to the area and would be armed. There were disagreements in the crowd about the use of violence and many demonstrators left. There was a report that 2-3 people were breaking into

apartments. The police caught two who were armed and were wearing body armor. There were about 150 people at 9th and Commerce. They moved up to the County-City building. There was some property damage, but no harm to people. Today the police are assessing what was damaged. The County-City building and South Sound 911 buildings were damaged.

Questions answered by Ake and Pauli:

- What steps did the City take to protect the public and area business? The City went on social media to let them know, blocked streets so demonstrators could move, responded to crimes.
- Why did the city move demonstrators? On Saturday they were moved because it was a crime scene and on Sunday because windows were broken and needed to be boarded up.
- How many businesses were damaged? Nine known so far.

City Manager: The City's Public Works staff delivered barricades, removed graffiti and cleaned up. Environmental Services deployed street sweepers and replaced and repaired containers. The officer involved was immediately placed on administrative leave.

**Council Member Hunter** asked about what regulations could be implemented regarding street racing. How many citations have been issued for reckless driving? (They will look into it).

**Council Member Ushka:** Clarified that PCUFT is the independent group doing the investigation. Clarified that they are only investigating the police incident, not the demonstrations.

- When will the body cam video be released of the demonstration? There is a process to request the video. The information will be posted at:  
<https://www.cityoftacoma.org/cms/one.aspx?pageId=192848>
- Were there people armed at the demonstration? Yes, there were several with side arms.
- Is there a way to know how much damage was done and a way to hold people accountable for it? They are working on this.

**Mayor:** There will be no public comment tonight, but there will be an opportunity tomorrow after the city council meeting.

**Council Member Thoms:** We need to restore civility and respect, and hold protestors accountable.

- He asked whether we can hold spectators of racing accountable. Ake: the drivers and the people organizing racing can be held accountable.
- Is concerned about the racing, the number of spectators and not the people the officer ran over. Ake: like a flash mob people can converge quickly.
- How can we distinguish between the demonstrators, participants in the racing, residents, and bystanders and hold them accountable?

**Council Member McCarthy:** He stated that he heard last night that the Tacoma Police Department SWAT unit took seven South Sound 911 employees to safety. Ake: the SWAT team was not required, they simply helped moved them.

- What is our plan next time when hundreds of people show up to destroy property? Ake: I understand your concern, but I will continue to emphasize life over property.
- He said he respects the peaceful protestors, but we need to protect the property of business.
- On Saturday, it is disturbing to see a police officer run over young people. How long did it take for the police to respond? How are we going to prevent this in future? Ake: because there is an independent investigation, we cannot get information on this yet.
- What information can we get?

Pauli: we share that frustration. We are following the state law I-940. We need to have a discussion about changes in the law.

**Deputy Mayor Blocker** - Thank you for the informative debrief, however, I feel we are off-track. This meeting is not about street racing, and Council members have spent over a half hour asking questions about that. The reason we are having this meeting is because an officer ran over human beings. That should be focus of this meeting. We need transformative policing. It happened because we haven't figured out better ways to police. Whatever ordinances we create on street racing won't work, we need better ways of policing. What is most important is how to deploy officers to preserve life. We have spent most of the meeting focusing on street racing. That makes me uncomfortable. It makes me uncomfortable that community organizers were arrested at the demonstrations. And we are focusing on street racers, yet no street racers were arrested. We need to do better. I am tired, and many others are tired. We can't keep making excuses for why police are not serving and protecting.

**Council Member Beale** - We are all trying to make sense of these events and we need to have grace for the council members. We are all going through trauma with Covid worldwide, and homicides locally, and nationally, people trying to take over our capitol. We are all going through trauma. We need to remember that we are all in this together. We need to remember we need to forgive to move forward. We are all in this trauma together. We need to remind the community that we are going through systems transformation and making changes all the time.

**Council Member Walker** - the process is important and we need to follow it. We are required to give weekly updates.

**Mayor Woodards** - There is a use of force page and all updates will be posted on that website: [https://www.cityoftacoma.org/government/city\\_departments/City\\_Managers\\_Office/police\\_and\\_use\\_of\\_deadly\\_force\\_in\\_tacoma#:~:text=Washington%20State%20Law%20requires%20any,investigated%20by%20an%20independent%20agency](https://www.cityoftacoma.org/government/city_departments/City_Managers_Office/police_and_use_of_deadly_force_in_tacoma#:~:text=Washington%20State%20Law%20requires%20any,investigated%20by%20an%20independent%20agency).

**Council Member Hines** - we are trying to build trust and nothing that has happened in the last 48 hours reflects what we believe should happen in Tacoma. We need to build trust.

**Mayor Woodards** - I called for this meeting because these conversations need to be public so you can see and hear what we are thinking. Thanks city manager and police chief and council members. What happened on Saturday is a tragedy. We know that there are inequities in this city. It is hard to talk about healing when these things keep happening. We keep asking for patience, trust, and resilience. We are all tired. We have begun to put into place processes. We must continue to make change. We will fight together for changes in the police and elsewhere. There is lot more we need to do. We have to do it together, as frustrating as it is, we must continue to work. We will not tolerate people who come into our city and try to make it something it is not, but we also will not tolerate hurting innocent people. We need to hold our City Manager and interim Chief accountable. Tomorrow I will testify for an independent state investigative agency, but we need to ensure that such a body will provide information to elected officials so we can respond to the public.

**Meeting adjourned** at 6:04pm