

Police Chief Rick Lewis told the Springfield City Club that the project to install body cameras remains on target, although the February timeline for implementation might slip slightly into March. At the December 10 program, Chief Lewis pointed to two reasons for the timeline being so tight. First, while they received a \$120,000 grant, grant implementation introduced some delays. Second, during the process they discovered that body cameras alone were not an adequate solution. They decided that it was necessary to also install in-car video cameras, to capture the moments before an enforcement contact with the public. He said that he was somewhat surprised that studies of departments that have already implemented cameras did not show any real reduction in the number of interactions once the cameras were in place.

In response to a question, Chief Lewis said that the cameras would not be turned on constantly but must be activated by an officer. He said that it was important not to have the cameras on in certain situations, like interviewing sexual assault victims or when interviewing in a hospital setting. He said that department policy required that the cameras be activated if an officer anticipated contacting a member of the public for enforcement and added that once the camera was activated it would record about 30 seconds of video before the officer activated the camera.

Chief Lewis expressed some concern about the size of the force. He said that at the moment they were 12 positions below normal staffing levels due to retirements and officers leaving the profession. He did say that a recent recruitment had been very successful, producing four new candidates, but noted that it is at least 10 months between the time a candidate is selected, and they are able to operate on their own on the streets.



Police response to demonstrations during the summer and the overall issue of use of force were major topics for questioners from the audience. Chief Lewis, while saying he did not want to get out in front of the report by an independent consultant on the July incident in Thurston, said the department has learned many things from the recent social protests. "We have to realize how quickly life is changing," he said. There was a major change in the perception of the police following the George Floyd incident in Minneapolis, he added. Before that, the primary perception of the police was that they were doing an important and difficult job. Afterwards that incident police seem to be caught in the middle between opposing sides in the social debate.

Concerns about potential disparate treatment by police based on factors such as race was also a major topic of interest from the audience. While Chief Lewis said he believed the department was doing well, he noted that there are cases where disparate treatment occurs, based on circumstances. For example, he said enforcement action would be unlikely against a protest marching down the streets, while were a single individual to wander out in the streets and try to interfere with movement of traffic, they would probably be arrested.

He added that the State of Oregon has mandated a reporting process for officer-initiated traffic and pedestrian stops to discern if there are racial or ethnic disparities. The recently released [Statistical Transparency of Policing Report](#) (click on the link to view) did not disclose any concerns for Springfield he said, although he added that just because the report was good, it did not eliminate concerns and officers must remain vigilant to achieve equal enforcement.

Chief Lewis responded to several questions about specific incidents in the recent past we citizens felt concerns, although he noted on some occasions that because litigation was pending, or charges have been filed against involved individuals it was inappropriate for him to comment.

Chief Lewis was supportive of the efforts of CAHOOTS in Springfield and said they had a great deal of support from officers on the street. Finally, he said that the department was working to improve transparency by making its policy manual available online to the public and looking for new ways that the public can register concerns about police activity.