

Community Meeting Record of Neighbor Comments – March 21, 2023

Speaker 1

A display of complete outrage against the Gainesville Police Department; its staff and policies; its reporting and data; and the K-9 Unit from a neighbor in attendance.

Speaker 2

Dogs should not be given chocolate, which was a story shared at the first community meeting. This could increase aggressive behavior.

GPD is not open and transparent.

City Commissioners need to take off their blinders.

Speaker 3

How often are the officers putting themselves in the shoes of community members? This is an emotional issue. I am a scientist and reliability of data is my primary concern. The data presented in the slideshow fails to prove your hypothesis. Anecdotal stories of K-9 contributions or heroism are not data. You need a scientific study not a public relations story.

I have looked for academic papers proving the efficacy of K-9s and most are inconclusive or show the dogs are not good at their jobs. Many cases of false positives, particularly in vehicle searches, occur.

There needs to be a clear distinction between passive resistance and active resistance when deciding to deploy a K-9. I did not see that in this presentation.

People are not criminals until convicted, yet that word was used multiple times. There needs to be a real attempt to look at the disconnect between GPD and the community it serves.

Speaker 4

I served on the GPD K-9 Unit and can tell you the officers and dogs are there to protect the public, the officers, and even the suspects who might be injured or killed by other means of response if they are resisting arrest.

The dogs do more than track subjects. They are definitely a deterrent.

Speaker 5

A Taser is not a nonlethal weapon. Particularly for people of color, it can be more deadly due to interaction with higher levels of melanin in the skin.

Many dog breeds could be better choices for the K-9 Unit, particularly those with a more advanced sense of smell: basset hounds, bloodhounds, beagles. These dogs can assist with someone resisting arrest but do not have the capability of pulling a person apart as do the breeds used by GPD.

Officer Ratliff left the K-9 Unit and claimed it had a racist culture. You need to clear the deck. Everyone who was part of the unit at that time, who did not leave or object, must be removed in order to rebuild a useful unit. All old staff need to go.

Dogs have a history of slave finding and military use. That is not a “serve and protect” posture.

Speaker 6

I have hosted community events at the MLK Center and other places, and my goal is to bring people together. My work is transforming grief and I see the grief in this room manifesting as anger.

I have lost two young great-grandchildren. One was a drowning the other was a crib death. GPD officers who responded to these incidents showed great compassion in comforting our family.

Officers see sad events all the time. Let’s have the dialogue needed to move forward. I have been waiting since the original meetings last fall for the City Commission to follow up as promised.

Speaker 7

We want to see the unit disbanded. The Alachua County Labor Coalition is exasperated. I have a PhD in Political Science and have always admired Gainesville for its civic identity and transparency. This issue with the K-9 Unit is changing that perception.

I feel the back and forth with the unit—on duty and then off and then on—created violations of public trust.

We’re jumping the gun by teaming with the Alachua County Sheriff’s Office to continue K-9 support of GPD. Bringing the dogs back without hearing from the Public Safety Committee is a mistake. A lot of changes are happening before the City Commission—our local legislative body—has had an opportunity to weigh in on the decisions being made.

Speaker 8

K-9s are disproportionately used against the Black population and against males.

I read an online dissertation, “An Examination of Police K-9 Force in the State of Florida” and this suggests that police misunderstand, misconstrue, or misread bite data. Police K-9s inflict more severe bites than dogs not used for police work. The dogs are unpredictable. They act impulsively and this interferes with their ability to comply and respond to commands. Police dogs often attack the wrong people. They cannot be stopped quickly during or after commencing an attack. Police departments are often reluctant to remove dogs from service due to the high cost of replacement and training.

Speaker 9

This slideshow could be posted online with the meeting announcement so it wouldn’t have to be given during the meeting and all time could be allotted to public comment.

You said 96 other municipalities in Florida have K-9 Units. We need data and independent reviews of these units by professional statisticians.

I question the reliability of internal review processes in place at GPD. Internal review is not objective. There is a police culture that makes people go along with things that are wrong. This is happening across the country. It is impacting our young Black males and it is an epidemic.

So let's be leaders and progressive, as we claim to be, and get rid of the K-9 Unit. And let's provide better training for our GPD officers. Calling everyone you come up against a "criminal" is a mindset that should be changed.

Speaker 10

Interrupted repeatedly by display of outrage from a neighbor in attendance and unable to go on.