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SPEAKERS

Isabel Cleary, NBC29, Sean Tubbs, Michael C. Rogers, Michael Kochis, Joe Thomas, WCHV Radio, Brielle Entzminger, C-Ville Weekly, Alexia Williams, CBS19, Kyle Ervin, Alice Berry, Daily Progress



Michael C. Rogers 00:09

Glad to have the press up represented here today, I thought it would be a good idea for us to formally introduce to you Michael Kochis. City Council last night approved my nomination of Mr. Kochis as Police Chief. It was an exhaustive search process, very intense. We had three candidates that you all saw at a public forum. During that day, those candidates had been through 12 hours of activities, we put them through a very rigorous process that at the end of that process, all those involved agree that Michael Kochis was the person that should be nominated to be police chief in the district. So we'd like to welcome him to the city. He'll be joining us on the 16th of January, and we look forward to his leadership and department. Chief Kochis, any comments you want to make?



Michael Kochis 02:05

Well, good afternoon and city manager Rogers. Great to see you again, sir. Deputy City Manager Marshall, thank you and for your correspondence back and forth. It's been very helpful for the last two days to with with a lot going on. And Deputy City Manager [Sanders], I appreciate all of the work everyone has put into this process. As City Manager Rogers said, it was an exhaustive process. And I really do appreciate that it tells me the the the care and thoughtfulness that has been put into this position and into this role within the city of Charlottesville. So I look forward to getting started. And that and that transition, I met with my town manager today. And we've come up with a process of moving forward for that for smooth transition because I think what the community wants and deserves that and the community the Charlottesville deserve as well.



Sean Tubbs

The question and answer period was moderated by Kyle Ervin, the Public Information Officer for the City of Charlottesville Police Department.

K Kyle Ervin 03:08

Well, thank you all this time for members of the media that wish to ask questions. Please select the raise hand icon in the Zoom webinar. Questions will be taken in order by which hands are raised. When you're called upon, please state your name and media affiliation. You may ask the question and a follow up question. As time permits, additional questions may be entertained. Let's see who we have for our first participants. All right. At the top we have Joe Thomas.

J Joe Thomas, WCHV Radio 03:41

Joe Thomas WCHV radio. Chief, I appreciate you holding this press conference. You said during your appearance at the Civilian Police Pversight Board forum that you had done some research into Charlottesville and looked into where we are and how we've gotten here. Have you in that research spoken to any of the previous chiefs? And now that you know kind of where we are and once you learn the volatility of this position, what skills do you have that will help you both conduct the work of a police department in a volatile political position. And if you have time for a follow up, I'd like to ask you about the potential of a new city manager once a permanent one is selected.

M Michael Kochis 04:32

Yes, sir. Thank you. Great. Great question, sir. So in the Commonwealth of Virginia, that police chief world well, it's pretty small in general. And I think that goes throughout the country as well. It's a group of peers that while you may not have may not have a formal relationship with personal relationship with them, when you talk to him for the first time it seems like you've known him forever and ever. So I have reached out to my peers, I don't want to talk about specific, I've talked to a lot of people leading up to the process. I've spoken to a lot of folks, chiefs, deputy chiefs, other managers. And to really get perspective, and I will tell you, I've been chief in Warrenton for three years, and I continue to this day to speak with my peers. Because there's challenges that we deal with, whether you're at a small department, a large department, small community, large community, these are complex issues that we're dealing with in our communities. And, you know, I think our communities expect nothing less than for us to be communicating about best practices, what's working in one jurisdiction may not be working in another. And I will tell you, the Virginia Association of Chiefs has also been helpful in speaking with them as well. So the answer your question without I'd rather prefer not to say who I talked to, because I talked to a lot of people, we'd probably be here for a few hours if I did.

J Joe Thomas, WCHV Radio 06:00

Understood, but what skill set do you bring to the job, given our volatile political environment as it revolves around the police?

M Michael Kochis 06:11

So you know, obviously, there is a volatile environment, but I don't think that the unique to

So you know, obviously, there is a volatile environment, but I don't think that's unique to Charlottesville. I think in general, within our profession, you're you're seeing a transition. Right? We talk a lot I talked about this during the forum about what does the 22nd [century] policing report look like? And that may sound simple, but that answer, I believe, is pretty complex. And I think communities, whether it be Charlottesville, Alexandria, or any other jurisdiction in this in this country, is going to have to really figure out and our leaders within our police organizations are going to need to do that.

M

Michael Kochis 06:54

So, you know, I know there's a lot of conversation around Charlottesville and policing and the relationship between Charlottesville community in Charlottesville police department. But in my brief conversations, I those folks who signed up to serve the city, the citizens of the city of Charlottesville with the Charlottesville Police Department did so for a purpose. Right, you know, and and I got to get to know them. I want to get to know the women and men of that agency. And, you know, I need to understand where they're at and and how we move forward. Thank you, sir.

K

Kyle Ervin 07:33

Thank you, sir. And thank you, Mr. Thomas, for your question.

M

Michael C. Rogers 07:36

Let me go back to Miss Thomas. His follow up was about what happens when a new city manager permanent city manager comes?

M

Michael Kochis 07:47

Yeah, that's a good question.

M

Michael C. Rogers 07:49

And let me just just say, Mr. Thomas, that every day, city managers are hired into cities where there's already an existing police chief. And he's the police chief for the city, though he reports directly to the city manager. And there is a professional courtesy that happens as long as any professional who reports to a professional city manager is doing their job. You know, you work it out, so I don't think he has, we need to be concerned about that.

M

Michael Kochis 08:27

And I'm not.

K

Kyle Ervin 08:32

Thank you, gentlemen. Next up, we have Alexia Williams. Alexia, once selected, could you please unmute your mic?

A

Alexia Williams, CBS19 08:41

My name is Alexia Williams and I'm a reporter with CBS 19 News. My question today is the city's former police chief, RaShall Brackney, has made a lot of claims in the past and many of these claims revolve around the department's racism and sexism. Are you aware of these claims? And how will you address them?

M

Michael Kochis 09:07

I am aware of those claims and they're pretty pretty serious claims. I don't know the details of what happened or anything to do with the former chief. I've met her one time and that was at the forum. She was cordial came up spoke with me and and like I said, very, very cordial conversation. But other than that, I've never had a conversation with the with the former chief. So I'm not going to pass judgment on her or any of that be completely honest with you. I will say the accusation of racism within not only a police department, any government entity or any position of trust, should be taken very seriously. And I will tell you if that accusation on anybody or any person deserves a full and thorough investigation. And if I had any evidence that that would be occurring that will be dealt with. But I will tell you that the accusation, you know, the officer, those officers who are accused of that if there are any that are being accused of that I don't have specifics at this point. They deserve deserve a full investigation.

A

Alexia Williams, CBS19 10:24

All right, perfect. And I actually have a follow up question. Are you available to do that? Okay, perfect. Going back to some of those claims. I know your past in the law enforcement realm, and also in Warrenton led you to this position. And how are you going to change Charlottesville? Or what are you going to add kind of like the last question that we had? What are your elements that you're bringing forth to the table with your experience from Warrenton, and your years as a police officer and a chief?

M

Michael Kochis 11:00

So that's a great question. And, you know, and I've spoken a lot about this about trust and building trust, you know, trust isn't lost overnight, it's not going to be gained overnight. And so there's a lot of work to do. But I think the last thing you want is a chief coming in on day one, and starting to judge everybody on based based on what they've heard in the media, or in the public or anywhere else, and then turning a place upside down. That's not the role of a leader. It's my job to come in and just in listen and have real life conversations with the women and men of the Charlottesville Police Department, and then the community. At the end of the day, that's why we're there is to involve the community in their police department, and to serve them and to meet their expectations. And in order for me to understand your expectations, it's

going to take a lot of conversations, it's going to allow me being present in those communities. And listening to a lot of people and talking to a lot of people in it. Like it was just announced last night. Council just voted on this last night. But I can tell you even today, I mean, my phone hasn't stopped ringing and folks have been reaching out and it is confirming what I thought when I looked at Charlottesville, that it is a community that that is screaming to be engaged with their police department and screaming to be involved in a police department. So we're going to be doing just that. And there'll be a lot of conversations.

A

Alexia Williams, CBS19 12:24

Awesome. Well, thank you so much.

K

Kyle Ervin 12:27

Hey, thank you, Alexa. Mr. Rogers, did you have anything to add?

M

Michael C. Rogers 12:33

No, I think that one of the things I've asked the Chief to do is come in and start a strategic planning process for for the department. And I think that that will help uncover a number of the issues that are talked about and and give us input from from the field in terms of what we need to do to move forward under his leadership. So I think we are in a good, good space.

K

Kyle Ervin 13:11

Thank you all moving forward. Next up, we have Isabel Cleary. Yes, we can hear you.

I

Isabel Cleary, NBC29 13:18

Hello, my name is Isabel Cleary. I'm with NBC 29. And my first question is, from what you've been able to learn from the forum and talking with city leaders, what are some of your top priorities when you start on day one? And kind of in conjunction with that, what are some of your ideas to fill the vacancies in the department that it really kind of has been struggling with for a while now

M

Michael Kochis 13:39

Well, thank you. Great question. So as the city manager has said, one of the things one of one of those primary tasks to get done is to develop a strategic plan, and identify specific strategic priorities. Now, strategic plan can be complex, and it's equally as important to involve all the correct stakeholders in developing that strategic plan to include the community, city staff, you know, police department staff, the Community Oversight Board, and and other key stakeholders. Right. So again, that goes back to listening and, and bringing that together, and then developing what, what is our collaborative? What are our collaborative priorities? Right,

that we should just sit forward the city manager has has been pretty clear to me that recruitment and retention is one of those priorities. And it makes all the sense in the world because you think about it, you can't do things if you don't have people. And, and so so we got to figure that out. I've said it before and I see it all the time. Recruiting isn't a one off thing from what is the what is the image that we're portraying to the public, right. Are you portraying an image of a SWAT team kicking in the door, or portraying an image of one of our officers sitting there tie in some kids shoe? Right? Like those are two very different images. And we have to decide as an agency, and as a community, what, what do you want of your police department? And what are we putting out there. And then when you do that, then you start getting the folks you want into the profession for the right reasons. And so there's a lot involved there, we could probably sit and talk about strategic planning for a long time. But that's that, that is that is probably that is the first priority. So then and that begins with listening, developing a clear vision and vision. And and going from there. Thank you.

K

Kyle Ervin 15:43

Our next question comes from Alice Berry.

A

Alice Berry, Daily Progress 15:47

Hi, my name is Alice Berry, I'm with the daily progress. So Saturday night, there was a shooting near some student affiliated housing not far from the University of Virginia, UVA police initially said that a suspect fled and then about 40 hours later, there was a press release from CPD, saying that actually, the person injured, suffered a self inflicted gunshot wound. And that CPD quickly determined that. So what we were wondering is what timeframe is appropriate? Because for a lot of people, 40 hours isn't a quick determination and what kind of information can the public? How quickly can the public expect to receive information from CPD while your chief?

M

Michael Kochis 16:32

So I can't speak to this specific incident because I wasn't there. And I don't know the details of what was going on inside or the details of the investigation, I can tell you that I've not spoken to anybody there about that. As you know, I start on the 16th. What I will say is this communication is very important. Okay. But without knowing the structure within the agency, you know, who manages the Facebook and social media platforms within the agency, right, and do watch commanders that worked in nightshift, do they have access to say, hey, roads closed? Or hey, this is happening? And that's happening in the training to do that? Or is it more centralized at city communications? I don't know all those answers yet. So, you know, so I think I to understand what happened and why I would need to know all of that. But I will say that, what's one of the things we do when I got here to Warrenton is really to, to put the information out there that's closest to the ground. Okay. So getting it out there quickly. Look, we're not going to keep up with social media. We can't, I mean, we're just not. Right. So but it's important for us to communicate with the public, communicate with the public efficiently and accurately, and then go from there. But without that, that specific incident? I don't know, I don't know the details about it. And I wasn't there. So I don't want to cast judgment on how they operated.

A

Alice Berry, Daily Progress 18:01

And I have a follow up question, if that's all right. Can you tell us more about your plan to address rising gun crime in Charlottesville?

M

Michael Kochis 18:12

I think Charlottesville is dealing with a lot of the similar issues that a lot of communities are in. And I've said this before, I actually was talking with someone today about traffic safety, right, we got speeding issues, and the data doesn't support that the speeding issues, but the reality of it is if your kid doesn't feel safe playing in the street, because people are speeding, it's still a problem. Right? So. So there's there is a gun issue, there is an issue with guns in the streets of Charlottesville, whether the data supports that or not, because the community obviously feels that way. So we need to figure out why that is, and who is bringing these guns into the city, and address them. And so, you know, again, without having all the data matters as well, right. And that's understanding what the community feels like, how the community feels, and then also understand what does the data show. And then you got to put all that together and come up with a strategy to address those specific issues. And it needs to be a robust strategy that not only includes the police department and our law enforcement partners, but also the community and community partners. We're not going to do it all on our own, we can go in there and arrest people and then but that's not going to solve the issue. Okay, so it's there. These are complex issues that call for inclusive strategy. So that's that would be my approach really need to get in there. Talk to folks and and figure out how we can how we can address the issue of gun violence in the community of Charlottesville.

K

Kyle Ervin 19:44

It seems we do have a Brielle Entzminger.

B

Brielle Entzminger, C-Ville Weekly 19:53

I'm Brielle Entzminger with C-Ville Weekly. Just had two questions though. Earlier chief you brought up the importance of community conversations to build trust between the community and the department. Obviously, that has been an issue for a very long time. I was wondering if you had any other ideas or strategies you plan to implement to help bridge that trust and improve it?

M

Michael Kochis 20:16

I don't want to keep repeating myself, but I will. Any type of community policing strategies have to be have to have a purpose, right. And so I need to understand what the community wants to see. Right. So some of the things we've done in Warrenton, I think would work in Charlottesville, like developing a community action team with key stakeholders who are involved in understand the police department in the minutiae of our policy. I also think getting out there and doing in Warrenton, we have wards, so getting out there doing community conversations within the wards. I need to hear from you, I need to be out there and you need to

and you need to be able to look me in the face and tell me how you really feel and what's going on so I can get a true sense of what the issues are. And then what kind of strategies will work. What do you want to see out of your police department? So I think those are some of the things you know, community police academy I know that our Citizens Academy, I know Charlottesville has one but you know, maybe having it where folks agree to volunteer time at the police department or with the police department or the police department. Officers are spending time with with the community.



Sean Tubbs

(confessing to a 15 second break in the audio due to a technical error)



Michael Kochis 21:54

...and hearing hearing what you have to say. And and I welcome those difficult conversations. You have to have them. I need to hear them. I need to hear those difficult conversations I need to have.



Brielle Entzminger, C-Ville Weekly 22:11

All right. And then I had one more question. So as Alice was talking about gun violence,



Sean Tubbs

As you can hear Brielle Entzminger's second question got a little garbled. She was asking about the role that service organizations that have recently sprung up, might play in an administration run by police chief, Michael Kochis.



It's the B.U.C.K. Squad. So I was wondering your thoughts on community violence prevention people going out there who aren't necessarily police in trying to stop shootings before it happened and how you plan to support those efforts.



Michael Kochis 22:48

I have not met any members of the B.U.C.K. Squad. I have done a little research into them. It seems like a group that is trying to do some really good work. And I would love the police department to be part of that. When I when I talk about including or involving community in their police department, I mean, that's the stuff I'm talking about. If they can, if they can meet with folks, they can meet with the youth that will talk with them and maybe not talk with the police. And they can prevent a crime or prevent someone from being shot or a mother from losing their child, then I think it's a great thing. And we need to encourage that. As long as it's done in the right way. We, you know, we and from what I understand it's not like some squad

that goes around like trying to arrest to citizen arrests and stuff like that. It's not that they are a group of folks who are trying to get out there and build relationships with folks who may not want to talk to the police and actually prevent crimes or beefs before they happen. A lot of these things are stirring and boiling up ahead of time. And they're trying to kind of get ahead of it and identify so I think it's good work that they're doing from what I can tell. And I hope to be a partner with them and and work with them.

B

Brielle Entzminger, C-Ville Weekly 24:05

All right, thank you so much.

K

Kyle Ervin 24:06

Thank you Brielle. If you gentlemen have time for additional questions. We have another question from Mr. Joe Thomas.

J

Joe Thomas, WCHV Radio 24:20

Sorry to double dip on this but the conversation reminded me. The Albemarle County Police Department announced last week that they're having issues with drug gang violence in and around the urbanized area outside of the city. Chief, what experience do you have that will help fight the drug gang problem in Charlottesville from your time in Warrenton or Arlington before Alexandria before that.

M

Michael Kochis 24:50

So there's a there's a thing that I like to talk about where if you focus on guns, you might get drugs and you focus on drugs, you might get guns. To me a priority is getting guns out the street. So I think that really needs to be our focus. That being said, we cannot ignore the fact of folks dying from opioid overdoses. I mean, it's, it's bad. And so we need to get a handle on that and figure out what's going on. You know, we've all heard it. And I truly believe we're not going to arrest our way out of the opioid crisis. When I was a commander of our vice narcotic unit in Alexandria many years ago, and we were dealing with it then. And we came up with a few unique strategies that really did help, we made a difference. We created a burner for a phone program where an overdose, somebody who had overdosed, would go to the hospital, a detective would actually come in, talk to them, and give them a phone. And then that phone was the certain number for services to get help, as well as the detectives number, so they could call them. And we would give that cell number then to folks who were dealing with addiction prevention, right, so they would then proactively call that person who had just died the day before and was brought back and get them into help and get them into some services. So that was very successful. And I believe that's one strategy we can use. And then obviously, the drug treatment court, which we did in Alexandria, we actually modeled it after Charlottesville's drug treatment court. And so there's a lot of strategy, but it's a complex issue, and people are dying from it. So we're gonna, I think it's gonna be a multi pronged approach to dealing with all of those things. But gun violence is probably at the top of the list. Thank you, sir.

K

Kyle Ervin 27:07

Mr. Koches, I have another question coming in via email with our participant who is here with us today, Sean Tubbs of Town Crier Productions. He says a difference between here and Warrenton is the presence of the University of Virginia with its own independent police department. The recent shooting illustrates that there are multiple jurisdictions. How do you think having a former police chief in that role will affect the way you approach your job? Somewhat related. Can you talk about your relationship with Culpeper County's law enforcement?



Sean Tubbs

Before he answers I want to say now that Warrenton is actually in Fauquier County, not Culpeper County.

M

Michael Kochis 28:00

Yes, sure. So I'll start with Culpeper County. I know, the former chief who just announced his retirement pretty well, and I know their Deputy Chief. I've honestly, I've think I've been to Culpeper maybe two or three times in my life. So as for working with surrounding jurisdictions, I mean, that's something that I've been doing since I've been in law enforcement, and we have to. These things don't stop at the border of Charlottesville. Right. So I'm gonna have to work with my with my with my peers and my law enforcement partners in Albemarle County, at UVA, Virginia State Police, with the FBI, with DEA, ATF. Our community expects that, right? It's someone who is lost, lost someone to gun violence. They don't want to hear well, it happened in Charlottesville, so I'm not going to go there or it happened on campus. They don't want to hear that we they expect more from from from the law enforcement professionals and I believe we'll do just that

M

Michael C. Rogers 29:09

I might note that part of our drill on the 28th was to start the candidates meeting with the Sheriff of Albemarle County and the Sheriff of Charlottesville. Chief Longo from the University was invited but could not attend because he has had his hands full with things that were happening there. But the chief certainly recognizes the importance of the regional collaboration. You can't do it without and and I recognize that, you know, Sheriff Reeves, had a big statement on gang violence and in the region and it's not just in in the county, it's in the city as well. So we've got to put a focus on it and it's got to be a collaboration across agencies in order to deal with it.

K

Kyle Ervin 30:10

I've got another question coming in from Alexia Williams.

A

Alexia Williams, CBS19 30:12

Hi again. So speaking on gun violence and juvenile violence in particular, we've seen a lot of gun related shootings and incidences within Charlottesville just within the last three months. A lot of it having to do with juveniles, obtaining weapons and shooting one another. I just want to know, what's the difference? How are you going to approach juveniles related to gun violence? versus adults related to gun violence? And how are we going to lower these statistics?

M

Michael Kochis 30:46

It's a complicated, complicated conversation, because building relationships with youth at a very young age is very important. So we have to, we really need to sit down and understand what kind of programs and that that that we have within the city that that allows law enforcement and other other members of government to be involved with the youth at a young age, so they see them as a positive role model. And so someone who, so they have something to look forward to or look up to other than what they may see from a gang, another gang member, who may be trying to sell them a different way of life. Right. So I think it's important that we build those relationships at a very young age. And I think that's where it needs to start. And getting out there and talking to parents and telling them what to look for. In Fauquier County, they have a program Hidden in Plain Sight. And it's basically it's where they set up a child's room. And they show them different things within that room for parents to look for, to see different warning signs, if you will, of maybe if they're if they're if their child is going down the wrong phone on a roll long path. So there's a lot of things out there you can do, but it's gonna take a lot of hard work, it's gonna take resources.

A

Alexia Williams, CBS19 32:15

Absolutely, and I'm hoping to have some of those implemented in Charlottesville, since you keep mentioning all of these wonderful programs. So looking forward to the future. Thank you. Thank you.

K

Kyle Ervin 32:26

So before we wrap up, thank all of the attendees for the great questions that they provided us. I wanted to open it up to Mr. Koches or Mr. Rogers, for any closing remarks you may have?

M

Michael Kochis 32:43

Let my boss go first.

M

Michael C. Rogers 32:48

We do appreciate the media signing on today. And beginning this relationship with our new Chief. We're all concerned about what appears to be an escalation of gun violence in our city. It's been more instances than we're used to. And naturally, people are concerned about it. So

that's one area that we've got to, we've got to focus on, but Chief Koches has pointed out that he will be present in the communities. He will collaborate with people across the city and get to understand the programs that we have in the city that that youth need. That's one of the things I always hear is that they're not enough programs for youth and youth don't have enough to do. And we've got to gotta focus on that and and try to change that trajectory, but for these for these young people, so it's something that the Department will be focused on. And the department and the community working together, it can tackle these difficult problems in our community. And I look forward to partnering with the chief and the men and women of the Charlottesville Police Department as we do that.

M

Michael Kochis 34:19

Well, thank you and again, I do thank the media for being here and asking questions and I, I look forward to questions. I mean, look, local media is a stakeholder. You have a role within this community very important role. And I understand that and I appreciate it. So please know that when I do come into the deposition that I'm that I am there for you and I do value your role within the community. Like the city manager said, programs or you know, giving youth something to do is so important and coming up with coming up with unique ways to, you know, I don't have all the answers. We don't have all the answers, you know. So getting out there and speaking with parents and speaking with, with the youth and getting their ideas as well, I think is can be helpful. So, so I look forward to doing that. Like I said, I look forward to getting down there and getting getting to work and looking forward to getting started. Thank you.