

Community Meeting Record of Neighbor Comments – March 14, 2023 and March 21, 2023

March 14, 2023 at MLK – 50 in attendance excluding staff; meeting timeframe: 6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Speaker 1

The policy list in the presentation is not exhaustive and does not show all current policies or clearly identify those that have changed.

How many times have you used K-9s to find lost persons in the past two years?

Will K-9s be used in traffic stops?

If you're reporting that when you deploy the K-9 Unit it leads to 10% of those apprehended getting bitten, that is not acceptable.

We do not want K-9 assistance from the Alachua County Sheriff's Office.

Speaker 2

As a former officer, I was involved in the pursuit of a rape suspect in 1977 and this led to the establishment of the Alachua County Sheriff's Office K-9 Unit.

During my time with GPD, we saved countless lives with the K-9 Unit.

Get the unit back on the street as soon as you can with the proper training.

Speaker 3

All the rules explained in the presentation are the same as the ones that went wrong with Terrell Bradley.

The dogs have no release command.

Terrell Bradley was not a threat and had already handed over his driver's license.

What happened to Terrell Bradley is what can happen under current rules and regulations.

Also, offenses only leads to charges—not convictions.

In the presentation, GPD was "bragging" about dogs being deployed in Baker Act situations.

Speaker 4

Dogs are sentient beings, unlike a gun or a Taser.

Dogs do not deescalate a situation. As a scholar who studied neuroscience, I can attest that when in danger people use a more primitive part of the brain to make decisions. This pumps cortisol and adrenaline into the bloodstream and makes fleeing and resisting more likely—not less. This is especially true for people of color who are targeted by the justice system.

I have seen allegations that police departments deploy K-9s to routine calls to intentionally skew numbers and keep bite ratios down.

Speaker 5

This is not a joke and GPD officers here seem to be taking it too lightly.

I lived in Duval for eight years and murders in that neighborhood went unsolved—they were not solved by K-9 officers.

This is hypocritical.

I used to hear guns in my neighborhood and never saw K-9s.

I call for an investigation by the Department of Justice.

Speaker 6

I have trained K-9s for 37 years and I have to back GPD on this.

The dogs are under control.

The dogs help GPD whether you like it or not.

The dogs are used for a purpose, to save us.

Speaker 7

My husband was a GPD officer. He was being chased by a suspect and his K-9 saved his life.

The guy being chased would have been killed without the dog taking him down as my husband would have used his service revolver next.

Speaker 8

My parents raised me to obey the law.

K-9s are a necessary tool.

Speaker 9

Where is the community? There's nobody here. We need more outreach to get the word out about these meetings.

A dog is "just another tool"—but you already have so many tools. Why is this one needed?

The history of K-9 use is not relevant.

Are you aware of a recent Jacksonville case about a police K-9 that become lost and bit three people who were trying to help?

Are you aware of a recent Alachua Chronicle article that reports on February 12 a police K-9 was working a robbery and bit an officer?

The presentation by Captain Ferrara was not effective.

You say dogs are used on “violent” suspects, but that is subjective.

Terrell Bradley was not being violent.

How many homicide suspects have been apprehended by K-9s? We want to see statistics.

It was said during the presentation that things go well when officers and suspects interact with “mutual respect” and I disagree. Officers don’t show respect and that’s why events escalate.

As said by the previous commenter, there are allegations that police departments deploy K-9s on routine calls to artificially lower bite ratio statistics.

It is reported that 11% of people executed for crimes have been posthumously proven innocent, so what does that say about those who are apprehended by K-9s?

What is the definition of a “call for service?” Are some of these noncriminal calls with no safety concerns? This would also impact the statistics related to K-9 deployment.

GPD may have a good relationship with community groups, but that does not reflect the feelings or experiences of individual people in the community who may have issues with GPD.

Community Meeting Record of Neighbor Comments – March 21, 2023

March 21, 2023 at MLK – 29 in attendance excluding staff; meeting timeframe: 6:00 pm - 7:45 pm

Speaker 1

A display of 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.