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Charlottesville terminates Police Chief RaShall Brackney

Tyler Hammel

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After months of internal strife, Charlottesville has fired RaShall Brackney, chief of the Charlottesville Police Department.

According to a Wednesday news release, City Manager Chip Boyles exercised his right to terminate Brackney's employment contract upon 90 days' notice. Brackney, who was hired by the city in June 2018, will be on paid administrative release until Nov. 30.

"I am looking for a new leadership direction in the department and we will start the search for our next Chief immediately," said Boyles. "We wish Dr. Brackney all the best in her future endeavors."

Brackney's termination meets the not-for-cause criteria of her employment contract, meaning she will be entitled to 12 months' salary, 12 months' lump sum contribution to a city retirement plan and severance equal to six months' premium health insurance coverage, if she is on the city's COBRA health insurance.

As of July 2020, Brackney was making \$162,198.40, though it is likely she received a raise in 2021 along with the rest of the city's employees.

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Assistant Chief of Police James Mooney, who was set to retire Wednesday, will remain in his position in an apparent reversal of decisions.

The announcement did little to clarify the reasons for either employment decision, but followed months of behind the scenes struggles that were brought to public attention when the Central Virginia Chapter of the Virginia Police Benevolent Association **released survey data** that indicated dissatisfaction among its members with the leadership of the city police department.

“The men and women of the Charlottesville City Police Department are hurting,” wrote Mike Wells, an Albemarle County detective and president of the PBA’s Central Virginia chapter, adding that the officers have lost faith in the department’s leadership.

In the 17-question survey, a majority of the 65 police employee respondents said they don’t feel supported by the department’s leadership and that they have considered other career options. Additionally, a majority said Brackney, in her role as a leader, makes them feel less secure in their careers and that they don’t believe she has the best interests of the department in mind.

The release of the survey was followed by a **lengthy unsigned release** from the city detailing, in part, Brackney’s efforts to reorganize the department and said the PBA’s survey and the release of its results occurred during “a difficult reorganization and the recent terminations of employment of members of the city’s SWAT Team.”

Breaking up the SWAT Team also was part of a broader effort to change CPD’s culture and how the department polices the city, according to the statement. Other efforts include severing ties with the Jefferson Area Drug Enforcement Task Force, posting stop-and-frisk data, dissolving specialized units within the department and removing school resource officers from city school buildings.

“When Chief Brackney commenced her work, the climate and culture of CPD was embedded in traditional, procedural policing approaches that created an “us vs them” mentality — a warrior mentality — which had not embraced, trained, or espoused the concepts of 21st Century Policing demanded by the City’s diverse residents,” the city’s August release reads.

The city’s rebuttal to the PBA survey also mentioned an internal survey dispersed throughout the police department in August 2020. For the first time, more-complete results of that survey were provided by the city Wednesday evening and painted a similar picture of internal frustrations with leadership.

According to the city, CPD received approximately 85 responses, which “invited officers to submit comments containing personnel information regarding identifiable supervisors and staff.”

“Before command staff could sort through and analyze all the information, the city began receiving [Freedom of Information Act] requests for the forms,” the statement said. “A decision was made to maintain the confidentiality of the information provided regarding identifiable individuals, in order that the results could be considered and utilized in a productive manner.”

Most respondents to the city survey — which also contained 17 questions as well as area for additional comment — wrote that they did not feel they would be supported if a false allegation was made against them, indicated that they believed command staff takes problems personally and said that they are seeking employment elsewhere.

“Stop pandering to the complainers and mobs — we will never win them over,” one of the redacted responses reads. “Focus on us, the police officers, and the honest citizens, the silent majority.”

Other responses include criticisms about command staff “worrying about politics,” accuses leadership of “allowing protesters to run the street,” and calls for more robust training and transparent communication.

It remains to be seen what the future holds for the Charlottesville Police Department and Brackney, Mooney and Wells could not be reached for comment Wednesday evening.



Brackney

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By Tyler Hammel

Reporter

Tyler is a reporter for the Daily Progress. You can reach him at (434) 978-7268
